

Ancient Tamil Poetry and Poetics: New Perspectives

P. MARUDANAYAGAM



CENTRAL INSTITUTE OF CLASSICAL TAMIL
Kamarajar Salai, Cheppakkam
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FOREWORD

The Tamils may be justly proud of the fact that Tamil has won the status of a Classical language, the status it richly deserves and should have got long, long ago. The *Central Institute of Classical Tamil (CICT)*, established in Chennai, has mapped out various plans including preparation of definitive editions of forty one Classical Tamil texts and translation of these works into English and other major European languages as well as into major Indian languages and writing of a historical grammar of Tamil. Language being the autobiography of a people, our objective is to preserve and safeguard the invaluable treasure of the literary compositions in our language. If only we could delve into our past and recover the riches and wealth of the mighty treasure trove of Classical Tamil poetry, we will be amply rewarded by its lofty poetry, the poetry that strengthens and purifies the holiness of heart's affection and enlarges our imagination. Apart from these, reading the ancient Tamil texts such as *Tolkāppiyam*, *Eṭṭuttokai*, *Pattuppāṭṭu*, *Tirukkural* provides a foundation for scholarship for the present and in this sense provides enlightened education.

It is heartening to write this foreword to the series of publications to be brought out by CICT, which I am sure, will do full justice to the masterpieces in Tamil without compromising on the quality of production. The *Caṅkam* corpus being a repository of our glorious culture, it behoves our present and future generations to study them and to convey their message and the vision of life embodied in them to the public at large. Let me, therefore, commend the series to the enlightened beings the world over.

Sd/-

(M. KARUNANIDHI)

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PREFACE

No apology may be required for bringing out a collection of essays examining ancient Tamil poetry and poetics from diverse contemporary perspectives. Now that Tamil has been declared a classical language by the Government of India, it behoves the native scholars of Tamil to convince the world that Tamil deserves the appellation that has elevated it to the level of Greek and Latin which the West has been unanimously cherishing as classical languages for a long time.

By 'classic' we mean a literary piece which has achieved a recognized position in literary history for its superior merits. Classical literature may refer to Greek and Roman literature or any literature that exhibits the qualities of classicism. When the word 'classical' is used to describe the characteristic features of a literary work it implies objectivity in the choice and handling of the theme, simplicity of style, clarity, restraint, order and formal structure. Praiseworthy books, according to Milton, "are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial, the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them". Great literature deals not merely with some aspects of the human mind but with the total human psyche. In Coleridge's view, its great achievement is to bring about a "whole-souled activity in man" by appealing to the senses, the heart, the intellect and the spirit of the reader. Besides possessing these attributes, Caṅkam writings have been exerting their profound impact on several succeeding generations of Tamil poets.

How did the ancient Tamils conceive art? To them, art, especially poetry, is not a simple source of aesthetic delight, but as Tolstoy contends, "one of the conditions of human life", and, more importantly, "a means of union among men joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress towards the well-being of individuals and of humanity."

The claim of Tamil classics to international recognition and to eternal fame is, therefore, based on solid grounds. In consequence of A.K. Ramanujan's English translations of selections from a few Caṅkam anthologies, the response by Western critics in the form of articles and

books is much more widespread than ever before. But not all of them can be said to be insightful or even well informed and some of them are not free from howlers. It is again the duty of the insiders to adequately project the Tamil texts, to properly explicate them and to periodically provide the corrective, wherever necessary.

We now have a vast variety of ways to interpret a work of literature ranging from traditional approaches like the moralistic and the historical through the formalist, the New Critical, the psychological and the mythic and into such post-structuralist approaches as deconstruction, feminist criticism, New Historicism, Bakhtinian dialogism and cultural studies. Caṅkam writings, being great literature, deserve correspondingly rich responses that are felt and reasoned. Such responses will be extremely fruitful when the critic appreciates these works from as many perspectives as they open themselves to.

Matthew Arnold rightly stresses the need to reassess even a writer who has attained the status of a classic.

If he is a dubious classic, let us sift him; if he is a false classic, let us explode him. But if he is a real classic, if his work belongs to the class of the very best (for this is the true and right meaning of the word, 'classic', 'classical'), then the great thing for us is to feel and enjoy his work as deeply as ever we can, and to appreciate the wide difference between it and all work which has not the same high character. This is what is salutary, this is what is formative; this is the great benefit to be got from the study of poetry.

Accordingly, the present volume of essays aims at subjecting ancient Tamil poems to a close scrutiny and at demonstrating how they present a kind of reality to which readers the world over will give perennial response.

This monograph has been made possible by the constant encouragement and advice given by Dr. K. Ramasamy, Officer-in-charge, CICT, to whom I owe a deep debt of gratitude. The work done by GAAMA DTP Division in respect of typesetting and pagemaking of this publication is commendable. I would be failing in my duty if I do not thank Thiru P. Sudhakaran, the man behind this venture.

INTRODUCTION

Defining a classical language as one that possesses the potential to function without the help of other languages that are found in the nation where it is spoken, that can be understood by the listener without being hindered by any verbal or semantic obscurities, that has the capacity to shed what is antiquated and to absorb what is new and an ever-growing vocabulary, its own words far outnumbering the words borrowed from other languages, Paritimārkalaigñar contended as early as 1887 that Tamil fulfills these requirements.

Another native scholar, Devaneyappāvāṇar, could adduce some convincing evidences of the primary classicality of Tamil such as its primitiveness, originality and natural development, and extraordinary copiousness.

That Tamil is one of the most ancient languages of the world has been testified by more than one Western linguist. Caldwell, for instance, observes: Does there not seem to be reason for regarding the Dravidian family of languages, not only as a link of connection between the Indo-European and Scythian groups but – in some particulars, especially in relation to the pronouns – as the best surviving representative of a period in the history of human speech older than the Indo-European stage, older than the Scythian and older than the separation of the one from the other? (2001: 30)

About the ancientness of Tamil and its contribution to world civilization, no testimony other than the following by Swami Vivekananda is required:

The Madras Presidency is the habitat of the Tamil race, whose civilization was the most ancient and a branch of whom called the Sumerians spread a vast civilization on the banks of the Euphrates in very ancient times, whose astrology, religious lore, morals and rites etc., furnished the foundation for the Assyrian and Babylonian civilizations and whose mythology was the source of the Christian Bible. Another branch of these Tamilians spread from the Malabar Coast and gave rise to the wonderful Egyptian civilization and

the Aryans also are indebted to this race in many respects. (1998: 120)

A.K.Ramanujan could easily comprehend the real strength of *Caṅkam* poetry which entitles it to a secure place in world literature and his assessment of it is just and insightful:

In their antiquity and in their contemporaneity, there is not much else in any Indian literature equal to these quiet and dramatic Tamil poems. In their values and stances, they represent a mature classical poetry: passion is balanced by courtesy, transparency by ironies and nuances of design, impersonality by vivid detail and leanness of line by richness of implication. (2000: 64)

Professor George Hart, who is well-acquainted with many classical and modern languages, states that to qualify as a classical tradition, a language should be ancient, should possess an independent tradition and a large and extremely rich body of ancient literature and that these criteria are met by Tamil. Indicating that the word “Classical,” ultimately derived from the Latin *classicus*, which means “of the highest class,” Hart has listed his arguments in support of his firm belief that Tamil is a true classical language:

It is almost as old as Latin; it possesses a vital and rich literature that is peculiar to itself and is not borrowed; it was standardized at a very early time; it was used in subsequent periods as a language of literature and discourse, and it exerted considerable influence on the traditions of other languages. There are very few world languages that have these characteristics. Other Indian languages are like the non-classical languages of Europe; they did not become productive literary languages until after 1000 AD, they did not produce their own peculiar grammar, and they did not produce any great body of literature that was entirely their own, without any significant influence from the outside. ...

It has its own poetic theory, its own grammatical tradition, its own aesthetic and above all, a large body of literature that is quite unique. It shows a sort of Indian sensibility that is quite different from anything in Sanskrit or other Indian languages, and it contains its own extremely rich and intellectual tradition.

Caṅkam literature is one of the great literary treasures of the world.

Its works provide a Tamil perspective on life and on human experience that is quite different from anything found in Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, or any other language. Its meters, its language, its conventions, and its spirit are all purely Tamil. Its scope is so large that it can easily be compared to any of the other classical languages.

The fact is, many Indian literatures have been influenced directly or indirectly by the Tamil tradition.

Everyone knows the *Tirukkural*, one of the world's greatest works on ethics; but this is merely one of a myriad of major and extremely varied works that comprise the Tamil classical tradition. There is not a facet of human existence that is not explored and illuminated by this great literature. (http://tamil.berkeley.edu/Tamil_Chair/Tamil_classicalLanguage/TamilClassicalLgeLtr.html)

Strongly recommending that Tamil be accorded global recognition as a classical language on the basis of its possession of Caṅkam poetry, Kamil V. Zvelebil writes:

Sangam Poetry is the expression of a linguistic, prosodic and stylistic perfection; it is a finished, consummate and inimitable literary expression of an entire culture and of the best in that culture; in this sense, it is truly a “classical” product, a classical literature. ... Those 26,350 lines of poetry promote Tamil to the rank of one of the great classical languages of the world. (1973: 1-2)

Tamil aesthetics, ancient as well as profound, has now been gaining the global recognition that it richly deserves. The theory of poetry as described in Tolkāppiyar's “Poruḷatikāram” and as exemplified in Caṅkam poetry makes it clear that even more than two thousand years ago, the Tamils had a rich and highly sophisticated set of notions of poetry which the West could arrive at only after several centuries of experiments and prolonged discussions and debates. The classical concept of poetry, showing great intellectual depth and understanding, was born of and shaped by remarkable powers of observation and meditation. The Tamils' exhaustive description of the name and nature of poetry appears to be almost the final statement on it. Martin Seymour Smith, in his *A Guide to Twentieth Century World Literature*, a close study of contemporary trends in about four hundred leading literatures of the world, has the highest praise for Tamil aesthetics. The Western aestheticians who stumble upon it, he says, will find it a shockingly pleasing treasure with its divisions of Akāṁ and Puṛam and its

strategic use of landscapes and a symbolic key. He avers that the classical Tamil theory is of greater practical value today than any of the bogus experiments conducted by a majority of bogus poets of the West and that it can serve as an effective antidote to the dry philosophy of life advocated by them. The Akām poems, in his view, function within a psychologically based framework that is flawless and appropriate.

The uniqueness of *Tolkāppiyam* as an ancient grammatical treatise and as the achievement of a linguist par excellence has been acknowledged by some leading Western authorities on the subject concerned. Daniel Jones, the British specialist in phonetics, having scrutinized the Tamil language as presented in *Tolkāppiyam*, praises it as a language

that illustrates particularly well the grouping of several distinct sounds into single phonemes... those who originally invented this orthography must have had a clear conception of the phoneme idea, though the theory had never been formulated. (Quoted in Sankaran's article on *Tolkāppiyam*)

He marvels at Tolkāppiyar's accurate description of the Tamil phonemes at a time when there was no recourse to any of the scientific instruments which phoneticians could acquire only more than twenty centuries later.

More recently, in an interview in which A.L. Becker, Professor Emeritus of Linguistics, University of Michigan, Keith Taylor of the same university and A.K. Ramanujan participated, the suggestion came from Becker that

Tolkāppiyar was someone whose bust they should be putting in American university libraries "because he opened up that Tamil world with a kind of care and thoughtfulness and imagination that is certainly comparable to Plato or Aristotle in the Western world. The way that he took the least part of things we do with language and subjected to careful analysis ... not so much to make the rules as to describe it. ... Tolkāppiyar is important because here we have someone describing the equipment to grasp art, describing the conventions, describing in such detail everything that is taken for granted by the people". (2000: 68–69)

Paying his share of the tribute, the Indian linguist added,

“Yes, the man who wrote the poetics. He was also a grammarian. He does it all for Tamil! Rhetoric, prosody and poetics. He’s very close to what you would call a linguistics’ ultimate guru. He does everything. He takes all of language, from the most ordinary banal language to the most poetic, as the subject of his linguistics” (ibid.).

Over an incredibly long period of its existence Tamil has naturally gathered a cornucopia of words, phrases, idioms, proverbs and sayings enriching and enabling it to become a marvellous medium of expression. The wealth of Tamil vocabulary and the subtleties and nuances of meanings of Tamil words have been admired by the right group of competent authorities such as the Western translators of Tamil classics. G.U.Pope, for example, in the very learned introduction to his translation of *Tirukkuraḷ*, telling his contemporaries that Tamil is an independent language with a copious and original vocabulary, concedes that in English it may not be easy to achieve the economy of diction that is possible in Tamil, which exploits the provision of ellipsis in all its variety. Having in mind the Tamils’ advantage of the use of *viṇaittokai*, *paṇputtokai*, *uvamaittokai*, *ummaittokai*, *vērrumaittokai*, and *anmolittokai*, Pope admits that ellipsis, though difficult to master, is one of the great beauties of Tamil.

What he says about the originality of *Tirukkuraḷ* and other didactic writings in Tamil should be borne in mind by literary historians and critics:

It would be possible, indeed, to find a close Sanskrit parallel to nearly every gnomic verse in Tamil poetry, but in many cases the beauty, spontaneity and terseness of the Tamil stanza seem to prove its originality (Pope 1984: 6).

Francis Whyte Ellis, who first proposed the idea of a Dravidian language family in 1816, forty years prior to Caldwell, convincingly argued that the four south Indian languages were not derivations from Sanskrit, that it was not necessary for their existence and that they form a distinct family with which Sanskrit has, in later times especially, intermixed, but with which it has no radical connection. Extremely impressed with Tamil literature’s concern for life here and now, he pointed out that “among the various and excellent works in which the Tamil language abounds to a degree excelled by no Asiatic and by few European languages none are more remarkable than what may be described as treating on human existence”.

It is in the course of his celebrated commentary of *Tirukkural* that he pays glowing tributes to the language and culture of the Tamils. Explaining that “the genius of Tamil is to hint rather than to define the signification of its words” he wonders

why so opulent a language as Greek has no term for “*iniyavai kūṛal*”, which, in Vaḷḷuvar’s usage, would include the several modifications of the primary notion conveyed by affability, courtesy or similar terms. In the absence of an equivalent to this, Aristotle was forced to describe the nameless virtue as the intermediate habit between flattery and moroseness, between that disposition which inclines the feeble minded in all cases to sacrifice their own opinions in deference to others and that by which men are excited to contend for the mere sake of contention (*ibid.*).

Ellis rightly chides certain European writers who have said that the Indian languages have no word corresponding to ‘gratitude’, the inference being that the very concept of gratitude is unknown to the Indians:

To this calumny let this chapter of Tiruvaḷḷuvar (the one on Ceynanṇiyaritaḷ) and the accomplishments to it be the answer, as in it the idea will be found to be expressed in many varying modes (*ibid.*: 230).

After translating and elaborately commenting on a particular Kūṛaḷ of this chapter, Ellis observes:

Both the translation and explanation very inadequately convey the strength and vivid expression of the original (*ibid.*: 234).

This is an able polyglot’s sincere, unalloyed expression of admiration for *Tirukkural*, the language in which it is written and for the culture it embodies.

The Tamil lovers of the present era are not the first ones to speak about the great antiquity of Tamil. There is plenty of literary evidence to show that the Tamils have been cherishing the notion from time immemorial. The thirty-fourth stanza of Purapporuḷ Venṇāmālai claims that “the old clan, armed with words, came into being, before soil evolved out of rocks.” One of the soberest of Tamil poets, Iḷāṅkō Aṭikaḷ, singing the glory of a Pandya king, speaks of the distant past of the Tamil land:

Hail to the southern king!

He ruled the south having conquered

the northern Ganges and the Himalayas
after the cruel sea had swallowed
the Pahruli river with the multi-ranged
Kumari mountain.

Kamban's Rāmāyaṇam says that the saint Agasthya won enormous fame by learning "the ever-living Tamil." Ni.Kandasamippillai proudly declares that Tamil was the tongue that moved the first man's tongue:

Let us prostrate ourselves
placing our heads
at the feet of
the foremost lady
ever-fresh Tamil
who gently moved man's tongue
as the time when
the primordial people
the world had yielded
were revealing their hearts
through hand-gestures
came to an end.

The Tamil mother, as presented by Bhārati in one of his poems, bemoaning her present misfortune, says that she owes her birth to no less a person than the ancient Siva. Bhāratidāsan always goes into raptures over the antiquity of Tamil:

We were born with Tamil
which was born with
the moon, the great sun,
the sky, the stars and the sea.

But, as the numerous statements by a galaxy of linguists, literary theorists, scholars, critics and translators would attest, the plea for the national and international recognition of Tamil as a classical language is not to be dismissed as a simple case of megalomania involving fantasies of past glory or as an intellectual exercise in futility. It should be evident to the just and the discerning that the claim for the classical status is well-grounded.

A phoenix is a mythological bird reported to consume itself by fire after 500 years and to rise renewed from its ashes and has, therefore, come

to mean a person or thing that has been restored to a new existence from destruction, for which reason it is praised by poets as a symbol of immortality. Tamil has had a chequered history with periods of eminence and glory as well as times when it faced humiliation and even the threat of extinction. And it has managed to survive “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” on at least three or four occasions and may, therefore, be considered a phoenix among classical languages..

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1. POETICS OF THE LYRIC IN GREEK, SANSKRIT AND TAMIL

In his essay “Sailing to Byzantium: Prolegomena to a Poetics of the Lyric”, Elder Olson categorically states that neither the ancients nor the moderns have said much that is valuable about the nature of a lyric, though there have been numerous abortive attempts at that. To be sure, what has been written about the lyric has finally proved to be a series of “bons mots on the character of the lyric poet, of startling analogies to the psychological or physiological effects of lyric poetry – of mere loci within a general discussion of literature which is concerned with the lyric only because the lyric possesses some characteristic in common with other forms” (p. 215). All the modern disputations about the lyric have been, in Olson’s view, declarations of individual predilections, or, as in the case of Ezra Pound’s famous precepts for Imagists, definitions of a doctrine or a convention rather than of a lyric poem. He, therefore, takes it upon himself to discover some index as to how, eventually, a poetics of the lyric might be arrived at.

Olson is fairly clear about what needs to be done and under what conditions it should be done. Any attempts towards a poetics of the lyric will be significant only in a philosophy in which the arts and sciences are held distinct from each other. And poetics in such a system cannot deal with every question which may possibly be raised about a work of art but only with those questions raised concerning it qua work of art. Questions about works of art may fall under many sciences, according to the manner of consideration. A question about a poem as an existent thing falls under metaphysics; a question about it as productive of social consciousness falls under politics. But neither of these questions would be poetic questions in the sense in which the term “poetic” is employed. Whatever answers could be found to questions about its *being* and *political instrumentality* would be mainly concerned not with the nature of poetry but with the relationship between poetry and something else. Two more statements that Olson

makes may surprise those that are aware of what Tolkāppiyar has done to the lyric.

. . . poetics as conceived here would not afford a series of recipes for making poems, nor a set of rules according to which they must be made, for the very character of poetics is such that it must be *subsequent to the inventive utilizations of the medium by the artist*.

Properly taken, poetic questions would be concerning the poetic structure of a particular work, in the sense of inquiring what form has been imposed upon the medium of words. Such an enquiry, properly prosecuted, would terminate *in a discovery of the parts of a work and of the interrelations through which the parts are parts of a whole* (p. 217).

Though himself a Neo-Aristotelian to be bracketed with R.S. Crane and the other proud members of the Chicago School, Olson concedes that even if the *Poetics* of Aristotle is relevant in a discussion of the lyrical mode, the great Greek theorist's description of the nature of a tragedy cannot be blindly applied to the lyric:

To attempt to find a plot in the lyric, however, would be a profitless if not impossible task; to attempt on the other hand to find in the lyric some analogue of plot in the drama and in epic, for the mere sake of imitating Aristotle, would be to run counter to the broader indications of his very method – a method involving the distinction of diverse departments of inquiry diversely prosecuted (ibid.).

Taking a valuable clue from Aristotle, Olson sets himself to discover some principle in the lyric which is the principle of its unity and order and which will not be something extrinsic to it such as the differentiation either of authors, audiences, subject matters, or orders of diction would afford. With a view to achieving this, he subjects "Sailing to Byzantium" to as thorough an analysis as possible and concludes that the argument of a lyric is its principle, "in a sense analogous to that in which, for Aristotle, plot is the principle of tragedy" (p. 227). The argument of a lyric which is its principle is not a dialectic referable to externals, but a certain formal collocation of terms which is referable to nothing outside itself and which may be called the soul of the poem in the sense in which Aristotle calls plot the soul of tragedy.

But Olson realizes that he has managed to describe only one type of lyric and the essay ends with a give-away remark:

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that all lyrics are of the order considered here. The term lyric itself has been given an extraordinary variety of applications, and the scrupulous analyst and critic will attempt to keep the variety of critical approaches almost commensurate with these, on the assumption that great art – however familiar the pattern in which it is apparently laid – is always in the last analysis *sui generis* (229–30).

One's claim that one has taken us close to a poetics of the lyric may not be justified if one has been able to identify the nature of only a particular type of lyrics when every literature worth the name has lyrics and lyrics.

By the word "Lyric" the Greeks meant only that poetry that was sung to the accompaniment of the lyre. They had no general term to describe all personal utterances expressing the emotional response of the individual to his own world which, in fact, constitute a vast body of poetry which is neither epic nor dramatic. There were two types of such poetry – monodic and choral. In the monodic, the poet spoke for the group with which he identified himself. Even during Homer's time, there were wedding songs, funeral dirges, paeans of thanksgiving and rustic chants of various kinds. It was only when epic poetry declined that poets started choosing the contemporary world as a subject and lyric poetry began to flourish. For a few centuries the great names in poetry were those of lyricists such as Archilochus, Mimnermus, Sappho, Alcaeus, Solon and Pindar. Finally, it had to yield place to the drama which, absorbing the lyric and the epic became the dominant form. The famous Greek Anthology is a collection of poems covering more than a thousand years, most of which are short pieces called epigrams written in elegiac couplets. They include love poems, epitaphs, prayers, dedications, satires and numerous other kinds. The importance of the musical accompaniment varied with the different types of lyrics. In the case of iambic poetry, originally satirical, it consisted of a few notes providing a background for the voice of the reciter. The elegy, chanted with the accompaniment of the flute for some time, lost the musical element. The light odes of Sappho and Pindar, sung to the accompaniment of an instrumental melody, were real songs. The instruments were few and harmony was largely unknown.

What Warren R. Castle, an authority on Greek literature, writes about it is worth knowing especially when we would like to compare it with ancient Tamil poetry:

Characteristic of nearly all Greek poetry is a kind of simplicity, sometimes almost naiveté, resulting partly from a tendency to treat subjects of universal

interest only, and partly from a tendency to treat all subjects in general rather than in particular terms.... Through its entire range of effects, from the most delicate loveliness to the most sublimely tragic, Greek poetry is *almost wholly direct statement, not the poetry of suggestion*. Further, it does not attempt to communicate private or unique experience.... Probably the two most celebrated lyric poets of antiquity were Sappho in monody and Pindar in choral lyric.... The Greeks called her (Sappho) the tenth muse and ranked her equal to Homer. Love was the subject of all her poems. ... Her method is direct and piercing; her art is an exquisite combination of simplicity, grace and passion...

The poems (of Pindar) are mostly about horse races and wrestling matches...He was the supreme voice of aristocracy, a thoroughgoing blue blood. He believed that the quality of *arête*, which we loosely translate as virtue, or more exactly as excellence, was the exclusive property of the nobility. ... And by the best he meant the landed nobility, who alone possessed "virtue". He had nothing of what we call "social consciousness" (pp. 93-94).

In comparison with what the Greeks have achieved in the dramatic form, their output of lyric poetry is meager. But what is extremely disappointing is their theory of poetry. Plato believed that the poet is probably possessed by a madness and not in control of himself when he writes.

For all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed. And as the Korymbantian revelers when they dance are not in their right mind, so the lyric poets are not in their right mind when they are composing their beautiful strains; but when falling under the power of music and meter they are inspired and possessed; like Bacchic maidens who draw milk and honey from the rivers when they are under the influence of Dionysus but not when they are in their right mind (Plato 14).

Since men may be misled by the poet's lies, Plato banishes him from the ideal republic.

And so if the tragic poet is an imitator, he too is thrice removed from the thing and from the truth; and so are all other imitators. ... Then the imitator is a long way off the truth, and can reproduce all things because he lightly touches on a small part of them, and that part an image...

Then must we not infer that all these poetical individuals, beginning with Homer, are only imitators, who copy images of virtue and the other themes of their poetry, but have no contact with the truth? (p. 35-36).

Aristotle is universally praised as the first critic to attempt a systematic

discussion of genres. But his *Poetics*, which makes a profound analysis of the nature and function of tragic drama, has very little on the lyric. Answering Plato's criticism of the poet as a mere imitator of appearances, his student claims that art is a kind of improvement on nature in that the poet is able to bring to completion what nature, operating with different principles of order, is still trying hard to complete.

Epic poetry and tragedy, comedy also and dithyrambic poetry, and the music of the flute and of the lyre in most of their forms, are all in their general conception modes of imitation. They differ, however, from one another in three respects – the medium, the objects, the manner or mode of imitation, being in each case distinct (Aristotle 48).

In the sixth section of *Poetics*, Aristotle promises to speak later of the poetry which imitates in hexameter verse and of comedy, but the work comes to an abrupt end after a comparison of the relative merits and limitations of tragedy and epic poetry.

Horace's *Ars Poetica* (*Art of Poetry*) is a celebrated Latin treatise whose ideas and catch phrases are supposed to have had considerable influence on the neoclassical movements in the West. His work is primarily concerned with the question of how the poet may delight and instruct his readers but he shows no interest in defining what a poem is or what literature is. By the phrase "ut pictura poesis", Horace means that poetry is like painting insofar as some works will be more effective when viewed up close whereas others have to be looked at from a distance. This analogy is used to emphasize the variety of poetry and not to restrict poetry to the effects of painting in words. Though Horace lays stress on decorum, by which he means the rightness of each part to the whole, he cannot be credited with an awareness of the organic unity of a work of art. But he is rightly remembered for his view of the artist as a craftsman and his concept of decorum.

It is an old question whether a praiseworthy poem be the creation of nature or of art. For my part I do not see what study can do without a rich vein of native gift, nor what the native gift can do without culture; so much does each ask of the other and swear eternal alliance with it. He whose ambition is to reach the wished for goal of the race course has borne much and done much in his boyhood, has sweated and shivered, has denied himself love and wine. The pipe-player who is chosen to play the Pythian piece has learnt his lesson sometime ago under the fear of a master (Horace, p. 74).

In his concept of the sublime, Longinus attempts to balance inspiration and rhetorical mastery. He describes various rhetorical devices but is not

merely interested in persuasion. A poet would do well to learn all rhetorical devices as well as to imitate and emulate great writers who had great souls. It is good to master the art of ordering of the parts of a whole but it is praiseworthy to aim at achieving sublimity, which “flashing forth at the right moment scatters everything before it like a thunderbolt” (Longinus 76). The artist, on the other hand, should be wary of a pompous, false sublimity.

All who aim at elevation are so anxious to escape the reproach of being weak and dry that they are carried, as by some strange law of nature, into the opposite extreme. They put their trust in the maxim that “failure in a great attempt is at least a noble error.” But evil are the swellings, both in the body and in diction which are inflated and unreal, and threaten us with the reverse of our aim; for nothing, say they, is drier than a man who has the dropsy. While timidity desires to transcend the limits of the sublime, the defect which is termed puerility is the direct antithesis of elevation, for it is utterly low and mean and in real truth the most ignoble vice of style. ... a third, and closely allied, kind of defect in matters of passion is that which Theodorus used to call “parenthyrsus”. By this is meant unseasonable and empty passion, where no passion is required, or immoderate, where moderation is needed (Longinus 78).

Though Longinus does not define sublimity, he identifies five principal sources of elevated language: power of forming great conceptions, vehement and inspired passion, the due formation of figures of speech, noble diction and dignified and elevated composition. It may be noted that the first of these five is a quality of the author rather than of the poem. The second may be a characteristic of the author or of the poem or of both. The final three are features of the poem. Longinus privileges truth and reality over the fabulous and believes that grandeur with some faults is preferable to moderate success.

The idea of the sublime attracted the attention of many eighteenth century critics including Addison, Burke, Kant and Schopenhauer who defined it in different ways. Whereas Longinus’ treatment of the subject refers sublimity to the work and the author, his admirers locate it in the audience.

Unlike Greek and Latin, Sanskrit has numerous polemical treatises written over a long period of time on many issues relating to drama and poetry. In Sanskrit also, as in Greek and Latin, there is no single dispassionate work that deals with the lyric comprehensively.

Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* states the theory of *Rasa* in all its ramifications. The following are listed as the eight sentiments recognized in drama: "Erotic (*śṛīṅāra*), Comic (*hāsyā*), Pathetic (*Karūṇā*), Furious (*raudra*), Heroic (*vīra*), Terrible (*bhayanāka*), Odious (*bibhatsa*) and Marvellous (*adbhuta*). *Rasa* is defined in an aphorism:

Vibhāvas are causes or mainsprings of emotion:

- a) the characters in a drama that excite our feelings
- b) setting: spring, garden, fragrance, moonlight

Anubhāvas are the effects of emotions that develop the main sentiment such as anxiety, anger, depression through which love (which is the principal emotion) is expressed.

A blending of these bhāvas rousing in the reader/spectator a certain emotion, accompanied by a thrill and a sense of joy is *Rasa* (Seturaman 1992, p. 2).

The dominant states (*Sthāyibhāva*) are known to be love, mirth, sorrow, anger, energy, terror, disgust and astonishment while the thirty-three transitory states (*vyabhicāribhāva*) are designated as discouragement, weakness, apprehension, envy, intoxication, weariness, indolence, depression, anxiety, distraction, recollection, contentment, shame, inconstancy, joy, agitation, stupor, arrogance, despair, impatience, sleep, epilepsy, dreaming, awakening, indignation, dissimulation, cruelty, assurance, sickness, insanity, death, fright and deliberation, which are said to be defined by the names. An additional list of eight temperamental states (*Sāttvika bhāva*) includes paralysis, perspiration, horripilation, change of voice, trembling, change of colour, weeping and fainting.

The practice of representation (*dharmi*) in a dramatic performance is twofold: realistic (*lokadharmi*, lit. popular) and conventional (*nāṭyadharmi*, lit. theatrical). No meaning proceeds from speech without any kind of sentiment. The sentiment is produced from a combination of determinants (*vibhāva*), consequents (*anubhāva*) and transitory states (*vyabhicāri bhāva*). *Rasa* is so called because it is capable of being tasted. Just as well-disposed persons while eating food cooked with many kinds of spices enjoy its tastes and are gratified, so do cultured people taste the dominant states when they see them represented by words, gestures, and temperament, and derive pleasure and satisfaction. A discussion of the relation between the sentiments and the states leads to the conclusion that just as a tree grows from a seed and flowers and fruits (including the seed) from a tree, so the sentiments

are the source (lit. root) of all the states and likewise the states exist as the source of all the sentiments.

The four original sentiments, Erotic, Furious, Heroic and Odious are stated to be the sources of the eight sentiments. Of these, the comic sentiment arises from the erotic, the pathetic from the furious, the marvellous from the heroic and the terrible from the odious. The erotic sentiment is light green (syāma), the comic white, the pathetic ash-cloured (kapota), the furious red, the heroic light orange (gaura), the terrible black, the odious blue, and the marvellous yellow. Viṣṇu is the presiding deity of the erotic, Pramathas of the comic, Rudra of the furious, Yama of the pathetic, Siva (mahā kāla) of the odious, Yama (kāla) of the terrible, Indra of the heroic, and Brahman of the marvellous.

The erotic sentiment proceeds from the dominant state of love (rati) and has as its basis a bright attire. The comic sentiment has as its basis the dominant emotion of laughter and is created by determinants such as showing unseemly dress or ornament, impudence, greediness, quarrel, defective limb, use of irrelevant words, mentioning of different faults, and similar other things. The pathetic sentiment arises from the dominant state of sorrow and grows from determinants such as affliction under a curse, separation from dear ones, loss of wealth, death, captivity, flight from one's own place, dangerous accidents or any other misfortune. The furious sentiment has as its basis the dominant state of anger, owes its origin to rāksasas, dānavas and haughty men and is caused by fights. It is created by determinants such as anger, rape, abuse, insult, untrue allegation, exorcizing, threatening, revenge, jealousy and the like. The heroic sentiment, relating to the superior type of person, has energy as its basis and is created by determinants such as presence of mind, perseverance, diplomacy, discipline, military strength, aggressiveness, reputation of might, influence and the like. The terrible sentiment has as its basis the dominant state of fear and is created by determinants such as noise, sight of ghosts, panic and anxiety due to the untimely cry of jackals and owls, staying in an empty house or forest, sight of death or captivity of dear ones, or news of it, or discussion about it. The odious sentiment has as its basis the dominant state of disgust and is created by determinants such as hearing of unpleasant, offensive, impure and harmful things or seeing them or discussing them. The marvellous sentiment has as its basis the dominant state of astonishment and is created by determinants such as sight of heavenly beings or events, attainment of desired objects, entrance into a superior mansion,

temple, audience hall (sabhā), a seven-storied palace and (seeing) illusory and magical arts.

As the main concern of *Nāṭyasāstra* is dramaturgy in its varied aspects, it shows little interest in the basic concepts of poetics.

Bhamaha is one of the early Sanskrit aestheticians who set out to formulate certain rules relating to Alamkāra or beauty in Kāvya. In his view anyone attempting a Kāvya should master grammar, the science of metre, the nature of words (as conveying primary and secondary sense), meanings of words, the stories in itihāsas, the ways of the world, logic and the arts. No faulty word should be spoken by a poet, for being a bad author is nothing less than death. While some maintain that figures of speech like Rūpaka alone constitute a Kāvya's ornaments, others contend that they are external, since the proper disposition of nouns and verbs constitutes the real ornaments of speech. Making a clear distinction between beauty of language or phonetic sounds (śabdālamkāra) and beauty of thought (arthālamkāra), Bhamaha is prepared to accept both. Word and meaning taken together constitute Kāvya, which is of two kinds, prose and verse, further distinguishable into Sanskrit, Prakrit and Dialect. Including dramas and grammar under the category of Kāvya, he advocates a four-fold classification: real narratives of gods, stories put together (fiction), facts relating to arts and those relating to the sciences. Kāvyas may be further divided into five groups: those that are built by divisions called *sargas*, those that should be acted or exhibited on the stage, *ākhyāyikās*, *kathās*, and unconnected compositions. *Ākhyāyikā* is a prose composition treating of an elevated subject-matter and characterized by agreeable words, meaning and style in harmony with the context. And it is divided into parts called *ucchvāsas*. *Kathā* is acceptable if composed in Sanskrit or in a dialect. The history of the hero is narrated in it not by others but by himself. *Anibaddha* (unconnected compositions) consist only in *gāthās* and verses. All compositions – from the shortest *muktaka* to the longest *mahākāvya* – become commendable if characterized by indirect or disguised statement (*vakrōkti*). Rejecting the distinction between *vaidarbha* and *gauḍiyā* dictions, Bhamaha states that there is no separate thing as *vaidarbhi*. This nomenclature is due to unintelligent people following blindly the lead of others. If a composition is devoid of suggestion or cleverness of statement but is merely clear, smooth and elegant, it differs merely as music does, by being pleasant to the ear. It is with utter contempt that he rejects the so-called *guṇas* or qualities like lucidity (*prasāda*), naturalism and tenderness (*komalatva*) associated with *vaidarba mārga* because he doesn't accept as

poetry anything devoid of profound meaning (*puṣṭārtha*) and artistic turn of expression (*vakrōkti*). Even Gaudīyā is acceptable as superior poetry if it possesses artistic beauty and elevated thought and is free from obscurity.

Giving suitable illustrative examples, Bhamaha describes the ten conventional *doṣas* or flaws in poetry. This list includes what is called *ayuktimat* by which he means the employment of clouds, winds, the moon, the bee, *hārīta* (a bird of that name), *Cakravāka* (bird) and the parrot as messengers. Bhamaha asks, “How can those that cannot speak and those that are of indistinct utterance, going to distant places perform their function as messengers? Such descriptions do not fit in with reason” (Seturaman 1992, p. 66). After enumerating the last four defects of speech – *Srutiduṣṭa* (offensive to the ear), *Arthaduṣṭa* (of improper or objectionable meaning), *Kalpanāduṣṭa* (objectionable construction), and *Srutikaṣṭa* (painful to the ear – cacophony), Bhamaha concedes that sometimes even objectionable words may shine by the positions given to them just as mere green leaves look pretty when interposed amidst the flowers of garlands.

Just as man who strings up a garland uses one kind of flower because it is sweet-smelling and rejects another because it is ordinary; again knows that one particular flower will look pretty when interwoven in a particular manner or that only a (particular) place is suited for a particular flower just as such a man strings up discriminating correctly – so should one (composing *kāvya*) dispose of words with close attention (Ibid. p. 70).

Anandavardhan (1974) in his *Dhvanyāloka* claims that suggestion is the soul of poetry and uses the term *dhvani* to denote the suggested sense or the function of suggestion. That kind of poetry, in which the conventional meaning renders itself secondary or the conventional word renders its meaning secondary and suggests the intended or implied meaning is designated by the learned as *dhvani* or suggestive poetry. *Dhvani* is the most intrinsic principle of poetry delighting all refined critics and all else is only a ‘puzzling picture.’ Suggestion is conditioned only by the relation between the suggested and the suggester and hence it cannot be subsumed under such figures of speech as condensed metaphor, *paraleipsis*, *metonymy*, *periphrasis*, *faced denial*, *ellipsis* implying a simile and merging of figures since we have a clear perception of the implicit meaning in these. Wherever the implied meaning is unimportant and merely ancillary to the expressed, it may be concluded that such instances contain only figures like the condensed metaphor. “In places where we have just a glimmer of the implied, or where the implied is just a handmaid to the expressed, or where its primary

importance is not clearly discernible, there is no suggestive poetry” (Seturaman 82). Poems in which the word and the meaning are solely directed towards the implied meaning are alone genuine instances of suggestive poetry.

Suggestion, according to Anandavardhan (1974), is two-fold: (1) with unintended literal import and (2) with intended but further-extending literal import. Suggestion is not to be mistaken for indication because there is difference in nature between the two. A word that conveys a charm incapable of communication by any other expression and is pregnant with suggestive force deserves the title “suggestive”.

Anandavardhan (1974) came under fire from his contemporaries as well as from later generations of scholars. He himself had to counter the charges that something called *dhvani* does not exist, that it is included in *laksanā*, that it is nothing but inference, that it is beyond the province of words and that it is patently absurd. Twelve anti-*dhvani* theories were mentioned by Jayaratha. The main reason for the opposition was that various schools of Indian philosophy like the Nyāya and the Mimāṃsā do not recognize the suggestive power of words at all.

Abhinavagupta maintained that *rasa* is realized through suggestion. In his view, the *sthāyibhāvas* as well as the fleeting *vyabhicāribhāvas* are dormant in the minds of the spectators and are roused by the stimulus of *vibhāvās* and reach the state of *rasa*.

Claiming that the doctrine of *dhvani* is only an extension of the *rasa* theory propounded by Bharata, Kunjunni Raja contends that there is no conflict at all between the theory of *dhvani* and the theory of *rasa* as the former stresses the method of treatment while the latter deals with the ultimate effect. “Suggestion, by itself, is not enough in drama or poetry; what is suggested must be charming, and this charm can come only through *rasa* or emotion. The emotion is not something which can be expressed directly by words, it can only be suggested” (Seturaman 1992, p. 288).

K. Krishnamoorthy (1979), a modern champion of *dhvani*, gives an interesting exposition of the theory:

Dhvani is the name given to the essence of poetry primarily in its synthetic aspect. It is first and foremost a complex whole, which also admits of intellectual analysis to cover every essential aspect of poetic experience.

... we believe that style is the bridge that somehow fuses form and

content. The Indian theorists before Ānandavardhana – Bhāmaha, Daṇḍin, Vāmana and Udbhaṭa – could not go beyond this analysis. While they relegated the importance of *rasa* only to drama, their *alamkāras*, *guṇas*, *Ritis* were more or less independent categories loosely hung on form and content...

What, then, is the soul of poetry? Well, the soul is that which sensitive *sahṛdayas* alone feel and which is behind the meaning grasped by dry scholars... The realized inner meaning itself, which is over and above the logical meaning or meanings of the poems, though invariably springing from this is its *dhvani*. The soul of poetry admired by *Sahṛdayas* is thus logical meaning plus something which is *sui generis* (pp. 88–89).

Vāmana is reported to be the first writer on poetics who has given a carefully outlined theory, “no longer naïve or tentative” (De 197). To him, “*Ritirātmā Kāvyaśya*”, Riti is the soul of poetry. The word (*Sabda*) and its sense (*artha*) constitute the body of which the soul is the *riti*. It is defined as *Viśiṣṭapadaracanā* or particular arrangements of words. This arrangement depends upon certain definite combinations of *guṇas* or excellences of composition. Proposing three kinds of *riti*, Vāmana contends that *Vaidarbhi* unites all the ten *guṇas*, the *Gauḍi* abounds in *ojas* and *Kānti* and the *Pāñcālī* is endowed with *mādhurya* and *saukumārya*. Riti is not to be simply identified with the Western concept of style. It consists of the objective beauty of representation of the intended idea arising from a proper fusion of certain well defined excellences and from an adjustment of sound and sense. The outward expression should be in accordance with the inward sense.

Vāmana categorically states that the *guṇas* are essential for they constitute the *riti*. Each of the ten traditional *guṇas* is shown by him to play its role as a *sabda-guṇa* and as an *artha-guṇa*:

Sabda-guṇas:

1. *Ojas* or compactness of word structure
2. *Prasāda* or laxity of structure
3. *Sléśa* or coalescence of words resulting in smoothness
4. *Samatā* or homogeneity of manner
5. *Samādhī* or symmetry due to orderly ascent and descent, i.e., when the heightening effect is toned down by softening effect and vice versa
6. *Mādhurya* or distinctness of words due to absence of long compounds

7. Saukumārya or freedom from harshness
8. Udāratā or liveliness in which the words seem as if they are dancing
9. Artha-vyakti, or explicitness of words whereby the meaning is easily apprehended
10. Kānti or brilliance, i.e., richness of words.

Artha-guṇas:

1. Ojas, or maturity of conception
2. Prasāda, clearness of meaning by avoidance of superfluity
3. Sléṣa or coalescence or commingling of many ideas
4. Samata, or non-relinquishment of proper sequence of ideas
5. Samādhi, or grasping of the original meaning arising from concentration of the mind
6. Mādhurya or strikingness of utterance, i.e., in an impressive periphrastic manner for special charm
7. Saukumārya or freedom from disagreeable or inauspicious ideas
8. Udāratā or delicacy, i.e., absence of vulgarity
9. Artha-vyakti, or explicitness of ideas which makes the nature of things clear
10. Kānti or prominence of the *rasas*.

To Vāmana, alaṃkāras (poetic figures) are only elements of secondary importance. What is of great importance is the presence of charm or beauty (alaṃkāra in its broad sense of saundarya) which is not specifically defined by him. The *Guṇas*, being characteristics which create the charm of poetry, are essential to it whereas alaṃkāras are only ornaments that may enhance the charm already produced. The *Guṇas* are nitya (permanent) while the alaṃkāras are anitya for there can be beauty even in the absence of figures of speech.

Since drama was considered by Vāmana the best form of composition from which other forms of poetry proceed, he included *Rasa* as one of the essential characteristics (when he defined Kānti as an artha-guṇa).

The Riti system was ultimately discarded by leading Sanskrit aestheticians on the grounds that it comprehended poetry only from the formal point of view not providing any deep insight into its inner nature, that it made invidious and useless distinctions between the *vaidarbhi*, *Gauḍi*

and other kinds of diction and that its minute differentiation and endless multiplication of the *guṇas* served no purpose.

Kuntaka in his *Vakrōktijīvitā* sets out to establish the idea of *Vaicitrya*, which, in his view, causes extraordinary disinterested charm in poetry. He maintains that *Vakrōkti*, which is essential in poetry, is to be taken as a kind of *Vicitrā abhidhā* (striking denotation) so that the *vakratva* or *vakra* – *bhāva* (obliquity) underlying it becomes synonymous with *Vaicitrya* or *vicitra-bhāva*. The *Vakra-kavi-Vyāpāra* or *Kavi-vyāpāra-vakratva* is the ultimate source of poetry. The ultimate test of the *vaicitrya* in poetry is the appreciation of the *Sahr̥dya* or the ablest connoisseur. Any composition involving mere *svabhāvokti* (natural description) is unacceptable to Kuntaka for a plain description of the *svabhāva* doesn't have the necessary strikingness. He firmly believes that since *vakrōkti* constitutes the only possible embellishment or *alamkāra* of poetry, all poetic figures are but different aspects of *Vakrōkti*. Though he admits that *vakratva* may be of infinite kinds, he lists a few important varieties. All *sabdālaṅkāras* are included under *varṇa-vinyāsa-vakratā*, all the beautiful grammatical affixes and terminations are included under *pada-pūrvārdha* and *padaparārdha vakrata*; all *arthālaṅkāras*, *mārgas*, *guṇas* and *rasādi* under *vākya-vakratā*; all beautiful constructions of plots, descriptions, innovations, characterizations and propriety of *rasa*, *sandhis* and *sandhyaṅ* as under *prakaraṇa-vakrata*; and the beauty of the entire work and dominant *rasa* under *prabhandha-vakratā*.

In Kuntaka's concept of *vakrōkti*, each variety of *vakratā* is inclusive of *vastu*, *alaṅkāra* and *rasa*, *guṇa* and *rīti*. Kuntaka's idea of *rasa* as *alankārya* is praised by Krishnamoorthy as the former's epoch-making contribution to literary theory. With regard to the role of *rasa*, even Anandavardhan is not able to take a definite stand in his *Dhvanyāloka*. Does *rasa* mean something objectified or embodied in words and meanings of poems or is it some aesthetic experience felt by the reader? Anandavardhana takes it to mean the reader's aesthetic experience more than once. But he admits the possibility of *rasa* being regarded as *kāvyaārtha*. And there are occasions when he credits the poet also with *rasāveśa*. It is in Kuntaka's analysis that Anandavardhana's idea of "rasavad-alaṅkāra ceases to be self-contradictory. It becomes the name of any figure of speech like the simile or metaphor which heightens the *rasa* intended by the poet. The material embodied by a poet is *alankārya*. The whole of it can be brought under the heads of *vastu* and *rasādi*, the former denoting the objective theme and the latter the subjective elements. Both the *vastu* and the *rasādi* are

made striking by the use of *alaṅkāra*, *guṇa*, etc., In Kuntaka's perception, if what is to be expressed is *vastu* and *rasa*, how it is expressed is *vakrōkti* or *alaṅkāra*.

But as S.K. De observes, though Kuntaka's work is of historical importance, his theory of *vakrōkti* "never appears to have received liberal recognition in the hands of later theorists. ...Kuntaka was apparently fighting on behalf of a cause already doomed" (p. 218).

A close study of Sanskrit poetics would reveal that there have been attempts at defining poetry in terms of *rasa* or *dhvani* or *alaṅkāra*, *guṇa* or *rīti* or *vakrōkti*, each of the theorists from Bharata to Appayya Dīkṣita claiming pre-eminence or sole recognition for his favourite idea. It cannot be denied that their writings have provided a number of brilliant insights into poetry, which have deservedly won the admiration of some of the leading Western aestheticians. But, at the same time, it has to be conceded that their endless debates and hairsplittings down the centuries have not led to a holistic view of the poem as a work of art or of the poetic process, not to speak of the name and nature of a lyric. It is the chief glory of Tamil poetics that it alone has been able to fully identify the salient features of a poem, emphasizing the importance of the whole and the interdependence of its parts. The theory of poetry as expounded in *Tolkāppiyam* witnesses to their success in unravelling the so-called mystery of poetic process and in pinpointing the essential elements of a poem besides cultivating their language as an extremely suitable medium of poetry.

According to *Tolkāppiyar*, the 'limbs' of a poem are: (1) the alphabetical sounds (*Eḷuttu*) (2) their duration (*Māttirai*) (3) their knitting together into syllable (*Acai*) (4) the various permutations and combinations of these syllables as feet (*Cīr*) (5) the varied integrations of these feet into lines (*Aṭi*) (6) the caesura – the coincidence with the metrical and grammatical pause (*Yāppu*) (7) the lexical tradition (*Marapu*) (8) the basic poetic intonations or fundamental poetic tunes (*Tūkkū*) (9) the innumerable garland like patterns of the metrical weldings such as assonance and rhyme (*Toṭai*) (10) the import or purport of the verse, controlling and vivifying all these parts, so as to make them expressive of the self-same purport (*Nōkkū*) (11) the basic verse patterns as so many permanent and natural sound configurations of the idiom of the language (*Pā*) (12) the length or dimensions (*Aḷavu*) (13) the harking back to the ideal behaviour patterns of an ennobling humanity (*Tiṇai*) (14) their varying main currents of activity (*Kaikōl*) (15) the speaker whose expression the poem is (*Kūrru*) (16) the

person to whom the poem is addressed (Kētpōr) (17) the place (Kaḷaṇ) (18) the time of the poem (Kālam) (19) the resulting effect of the purpose of the verse (Payan) (20) the sentiment or emotion bubbling forth there (Meyppātu) (21) the elliptical construction or the yearning after completion of the sense, at every stage of its progress (Eccam) (22) the context making the meaning (Munnam) (23) the underlying universality (Poruḷ) (24) the ford in the poetic current where the particularity enters into the flow of poetry or the particularity of the poetic aspect of the verse (Turaḷ) (25) the great linkings or the retrospective and prospective constructions (Māttu) (26) the colour of the rhythm of the verse (vaṇṇam) (27) the eightfold poetical facades (Vaṇappu).

It is to be noted here that the Tamils, long before Coleridge, could conceive of a poem as an organic whole. Since these twenty seven are called *uruppus* by Tolkāppiyar, T.P. Meenakshisundaran rightly observes,

Looking deeper into this enumeration, one finds therein, the organic theory of poetry taking shape and form. There is the age-long Tamil simile that verse is like the living body of a man. The sound and meaning together form one united whole. The bone, the marrow, the hair, the tooth, the mucus and their varieties of cells make up the body of man; one has to add to these the various mental conditions and other vital constituents of life, known and unknown – in short all the physical, the chemical, the biological, the psychical and the spiritual hierarchies, rising as tiers, one over the other, but all woven into a beautiful unity by Nature – all these go to make up the personality of man. Everything there subserves the higher purpose of this personality and finds a significance and meaning therein. Even a change in a tiny invisible cell, for instance, of a gland affects the pattern, though the organism may continue to live. So do the various parts of the verse go to make up its individual specific pattern and life (“The Theory of Poetry in Tolkāppiyar” 56-57).

The concept of poetry as expounded in Tolkāppiyar’s “Poruḷatikāram” would, on close analysis, justify the claim that the ancient Tamils had a poetics of the lyric which Elder Olson was looking for but could not find in the well-known languages of the world.

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2. POETRY OF INDIRECTION: THE TAMIL CONCEPT

The greatness of Tamil aesthetics is now increasingly recognised by the Western scholars who feel that it is subtle, complex and extremely valuable and may even serve as an effective antidote to modernism and post-modernism which have proved to be more an affliction than a healthy development in the realm of art. *Tolkāppiyam*, the oldest extant treatise on grammar, rhetoric and poetics, commonly assigned to the pre-Christian era, might have appeared a few centuries earlier than Caṅkam works and much of the poetic tradition described by Tolkāppiyar might have lost its vitality by the time Caṅkam poems made their appearance. But the theory of poetry as stated in the third part of the great work called “Poruḷatikāram” is not very different from the one exemplified in Caṅkam poetry. What both aim at, theoretically in one case and in practice in the other, is a poem that is objective, precise, complex, allusive and indirect.

If, by classicism, we mean a poetic theory that respects tradition, insists on restraint, order, propriety, proportion, balance, simplicity and reason, privileges brain-work over dream-work in the poetic process, and, by romanticism, a poetic theory that is bent upon overthrowing tradition, cares for inner voice as opposed to external authority, underlines free-play of imagination, profusion, mystery and rapture and shows extraordinary interest in the unknown, mysterious and fantastic and in the self-assumed melancholy, then Tolkāppiyar’s poetics will, by and large, fall under the category of classicism. It stands by tradition inasmuch as it recommends the characteristic features of the writings that had existed prior to *Tolkāppiyam*. In several places, after mentioning a principle, he adds cautiously “eṇṇa” “eṇṇaṇār pulavar” (as has been observed by experts). The rules and regulations catalogued by him are not his but must have crystallized in the writings of those that lived before him. He calls them “nallicaippulavar”, “Yāpparipulavar”, “tonmozhippulavar”, “Pulanunarntōr” (famous poets, poets well-versed in prosody, poets employing the ancient language, those well-versed in the poetic tradition). The term “pulaṇeri vazhakkam,” is used by him to indicate the literary theories

transmitted from generation to generation. Also he categorises the ways in which poems are composed on the given themes.

In his “Ceyyuḷ Iyal”, Tolkāppiyar lists seven literary forms and thirty four aspects of a poem. “Meyp̄p̄āṭṭu Iyal” provides an elaborate account of eight Meyp̄p̄āṭṭu which are further subdivided into thirty two. The section on similes (“Uvama Iyal”) is devoted to an analysis of the nature of a simile, its types, the contexts in which linking words are to be employed and the conventional restrictions and differences. There is a separate section on tradition (Marapu Iyal) which enjoins the poets to use words without violating traditional expectations and ends with a definition of a work of literature.

All the regulations, definitions and distinctions mentioned by Tolkāppiyar and the fact that a poem is called Ceyyuḷ (What is done) make it clear that in his conception of the poetic process conscious labour plays a major role. The inner voice and the mysterious power of creation stressed by the Romantics have practically no place in this theory. This is very different from what the ancient Greeks and Romans thought about poetry but close to the doctrines of twentieth- century Western critics. The Greeks thought that the poet is a possessed creature, an inspired savage, who is unconscious of the greatness of what he utters. But now the Western poets and critics acknowledge the importance of the poet’s learning and conscious engagement in the process of writing. T.S. Eliot, for instance, emphasises the role of criticism in creative activities.

Tolkāppiyar states that of the materials of a poem only three things are very important: Mutal (place and time), Karu (the native elements) and Uri (human feelings). The place is divided into four regions, each being presided over by a deity and named after a flower or tree. Mullai, a variety of jasmine, represents the forests overseen by Māyōn, the Dark one. Kuriñci, a mountain flower, represents the mountains overseen by Cēyōn, the Red One. Marutam, a tree with red flowers, stands for the pastoral region under the rule of Vēntaṇ, identified with Indra and Neytal a water flower, for the seashore protected by Varuṇaṇ. Pālai, a green desert tree, according to later writers, represents pālai or desert waste, ruled by Kor̄ravai, a goddess of war. The year is divided into six large time units, the six seasons and the day into five or six small units; morning, midday, evening, nightfall, the dead of night and dawn. Each of the five regions or landscapes is associated with an appropriate Uri or phase of

love and particular large and small time units with particular regions.

The *Tiṇai* divisions that might have evolved out of the works of generations of poets and grammarians proved very beneficial to the Caṅkam poets. It is not easy to convert the mental state of a hero or a heroine in love into a poem. If a poet is to undertake a search for the proper situation, background and imagery required for the purpose, he may not be able to concentrate on the choice of words and phrases and on their right arrangement. The great Greek tragedians like Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides derived this kind of immense advantage when they chose to dramatize the already available myths, legends and stories with exemplary plots. They could devote their entire attention to the writing of the dialogue for which they had to forge a style. When there is a common situation provided by what Tolkāppiyar calls Mutal, Uri and Karu acceptable to and understood by the poet and the reader, the evocation of the required feeling becomes easy to the poet and the identification with what the poem conveys to the reader.

In the absence of apt situations, characters and settings, the poet faces the danger of failing in his difficult task of evoking the desired feeling. What T.S.Eliot calls 'objective correlative' is very relevant here. By this he means 'a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion, so that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked'. The different kinds of *tiṇai* and *turai* and their Mutal, Uri and Karu which Tolkāppiyar describes provide, though partially, various objective correlatives to be readily used by poets. From these well-defined sets of situations and backdrops, the poet can choose the one that is in accordance with the emotion he wants to convey. This enables him to turn his entire poetic energy to the diction of the poem and ensures that his poem won't fail for want of a suitable objective correlative. On the other hand, it is *Iraicci* and *Uḷḷurai* which primarily help him compose a poem that suggests much more than what it states.

There are three aphorisms on *Iraicci* in *Tolkāppiyam's* "*poruḷiyal*" and three more references to it in "*Karpiyal*" and "*Poruḷiyal*".

Iraicci is associated with Uri. (1175)
Some meaning is born of *Iraicci* also.

That will be comprehensible to those well-versed in Akam convention. (1176)

Incidents of love will be alluded to in *Iraicci* in order to console the lovers pining in separation (1177).

Iraicci abounds in *Caṅkam* poems. In some poems it appears as a mere description of the place. *Aiṅkurunūru* has the following piece by *ōtalāntaiyār*:

They've come.
 Crossing even the hot forking desert paths
 Where the sharp toothed red dog of the jungle
 waits by the cactus clump to kill a wild pig
 for his mate
 now suffering pangs of labour.
 All the way
 they've come with you, o heart,
 the gentle ways
 Of the woman you love. (*Aiṅkurunūru*)

The hero tells his heart that the sterling character of the lady it loves has come all the way to the wilderness in which the red dog, in order to feed his pregnant mate, is on the lookout for a wild pig. Separated from his sweetheart, the lover describes his agony and the setting chosen is in accordance with the feeling expressed. The *pālai* region being the place, the cactus plant and animals like red dog and wild pig found in such regions constitute the *Karupporuḷ*. Here the *Karupporuḷ* has no hidden meaning though it serves well to express the pangs of separation intensely felt by the protagonist. A poem in *Kalittokai* dramatizes the agony of a love-lorn lady who tells her friend that her lover who has gone to secure wealth will certainly return because he will come across several scenes of male animals and birds showering their love and affection on their mates.

"Forests are hard to cross,
 their heat unbearable," he said:
 My girl of golden ear-rings,
 He also said,
 "the elephant there
 drinks the little water
 muddied by its young ones
 with drum-like feet,
 After feeding his mate."

"Forests are painful to pass through,
 Boughs charred by the heat
 Bearing dried up leaves," he said;
 He also said,
 "the dove there

spreads its soft wings
to soothe with shade
its loving tender mate
scorched by the sun."

"Forests are difficult to reach,
Dense sunrays burning
Bamboos on the rock," he said;
He also said, "the deer there
With its body's shadow
offers shelter
to its young doe
In search of shade." (*Kalittokai* 11)

The akam convention associates fatigued elephants, doves, desert trees, bamboos, stagnant water and the burning sun with the pālai region and with the theme of separation from the lover. In such poems Karupporuḷ explicitly becomes Iraicci.

Besides being a pleasing idyllic account, iraicci often becomes suggestive. A hero while returning home after completing his task at a far-off place, shows his charioteer a scene signifying the love of a cock for its hen and urges him to speed up the horses:

Let our tired warriors move
At their own slow pace
loosening their garments,
resting, relaxing on the way.
Spur on the chariot-horses
using the unused spur,
O charioteer,
behold the forest fowl
that sports on its skin
many minute dots of beauty,
its call very much like
the sounds of milk-drops
falling on melting butter,
holding in its beak
a worm dug from the earth
wetted by recent rains,
and looking for its mate. (*Narriṇai*, 21)

The suggestion is that the hero who might have earned enough during the expedition would join his wife as early as possible to lead a happy life.

The best kind of *Iraicci* is the one which induces, by its sensuous appeals, feelings of love and affection for one's mate and assumes a connotative dimension. One heroine of the Mullai region complains that her husband hasn't returned at the appointed time.

He hasn't come;
Jasmines have also bloomed.
Those holding sheep-hooks
in their hands
having left the sheep,
the shepherd lad
coming with milk and going with food,
has his head adorned
all with jasmine buds. (*Kuruntokai*, 221)

For Mullaitṭinai, the appropriate theme is separation/patience, the characteristic flower jasmine and the landscape forest/pasture. References to shepherds, sheep and cows are, of course, indispensable. The appeal in the poem is to the sense of smell; its arousal of passionate feelings in the pining heroine is obvious.

Uḷḷurai is another related concept which seems to have been subtly distinguished from *Iraicci* by the ancient Tamil bards. Tolkāppiyar defines it, again cryptically, in three different places in "Poruḷatikāram". In "Akattinai Iyal," he points out the difference between uḷḷurai uvamam and the other uvamai: (Eṇai Uvamai)

Uḷḷurai uvamai (implied simile) and Eṇai Uvamai (the other simile) are inescapable in identifying the ṭinai. (992)

Those who know the grammar of poetry say that uḷḷurai will have all the elements of the particular ṭinai except the deity. (993)

The implied sense which has been designed to correspond exactly to Uḷḷurai is to be inferred from it. (994)

The other simile is self-explanatory. (995)

A.K. Ramanujan's inferences from these definitions are quite illuminating. Taking every uḷḷurai as an inset, he attempts a description of their unique nature and function:

- (a) An inset is a correlation of the landscapes and their contents (Karu) to the human scene (uri).
- (b) Unlike metaphor in ordinary language, an inset is a structural feature

within the poem; it integrates the different elements of the poem and shapes its message.

- (c) Unlike metaphor and simile, it often leaves out all the elements of comparison and all explicit markers of comparison (e.g., “like”, “as”); such an omission increases manifold the power of the figure.
- (d) The inset is essentially a ‘metonymy’, an in-presentia relationship, where both terms are present, where the signifier and the signified belong to the same universe, share the same “landscape”. Both are parts of one scene. Such a metonymy, rather than metaphor, is the favourite poetic figure of the classical Tamils.

Adapting a remark of Kenneth Burke’s (1945:6-7) in another context, Ramanujan adds

This kind of “metonymous metaphor,” based on an entire formal scheme, is a special feature of classical Tamil forms,

According to Roman Jakobson, metaphor and metonymy are two extremes of poetic capacity. But the Uḷḷuraḷais which Tamil poetics has identified are found to combine both. A poem by Kapilar makes a splendid use of this device.

The small pond with its clear water and its sloping bund like the eighth day moon is now shattered in the land that was once ruled by Pāri (*Puṛam* 118)

In “Uvamaviyal” also Tolkāppiyar speaks of the two types of similes.

Since the correspondence in the Uḷḷuraiuvamai is not made explicit but is used by the poet in accordance with the ancient tradition, its real implication can be inferred by those well-versed in the art of interpretation. (1244)

Uvamappoli is of five kinds. (1245)

If the excellence of uḷḷuraiuvamai is sought, it is to be found in the terms of comparison that refer to action, result, shape, colour and birth. (1246)

All comparisons, according to *Tolkāppiyam*, are based on action, result,

colour or shape. For Uḷḷuraiuvamai, birth may also be a point of comparison.

“Poruḷiyal” has five more aphorisms that indicate the five types of uḷḷurai.

The mediators between lovers express their views explicitly. Their utterances will have no hidden meaning. (1187)

Uḷḷurai, a traditionally polite mode of expression is of five kinds: Uṭanurai, uḷḷurai Uvamam (inset that serves as a simile), cuṭṭu (metaphorical uḷḷurai), nakai (inner sense hidden in sarcasm), Ciraṭṭu (aggrandizement).

Besides conveying a hidden meaning uḷḷurai causes immense delight. (1189)

Uḷḷurai may consist in propitious utterances, words of abuse or contemptuous references to the hero's valour. (1190)

Anger, ignorance, jealousy and poverty may go along with ciraṭṭu (1191)

Some of these aphorisms have been interpreted in different ways even by the scholarly commentators steeped in the Caṅkam tradition. Illustrative examples may, to some extent, clarify the nature of each of the five types of Uḷḷurai. In uṭanurai uḷḷurai, the hidden sense exists within the subject matter of the poem.

Playing with friends on time
we pressed a ripe seed into the white sand
and forgot about it till it sprouted
and when we nursed it tenderly
pouring sweet milk with melted butter,
mother said,
“It qualifies as a sister to you, and it's much better
than you”,
praising this laurel tree.
So we are embarrassed
to laugh with you here, O man of the seashore
with glittering waters
where white conch shells,
their spirals turning right,
sound like the soft music of bards at a feast;

Yet, if you wish,
there's plenty of shade
elsewhere.

(*Narrinai* 172)

This statement is made by the heroine's girl friend to the hero when he comes by daylight. She tells him that the heroine feels shy to meet him under the very tree that has been treated as her younger sister by the family. The implied meaning of the apparently innocent utterance is that their mother may come to know of their frequent meetings and that the time has come when the hero should think of marrying his beloved.

In *Uvamaullurai* the native elements (*Karu*) are carefully chosen to constitute a complex and elaborate simile. In an *Aiṅkurunūru* poem a lady complains against her lover's cruel ways without explicitly stating the wrong he has done to her.

In the fields of his land
fakes flower like real canes;
shy of proclaiming his cruelty
I say he is good.
But my tender shoulders say
By weakening,
he is no good.

(*Aiṅkurunūru* 12)

It is in the *Uḷḷuraivuvamai* that the hero's heinous deed is hinted at. If in his fields fake sugarcane flowers like real ones and both are treated alike, he, in his heart, has given equal place to his sweetheart and his concubines. *Uḷḷuraivuvamais* are marked by this kind of one-to-one correspondence. In *Kuruntokai* we come across more elaborately worked out similes of this nature.

I don't disagree with him;
I do agree with him;
In the hill of his land,
from the *Vēṅkai* tree,
uprooted by an elephant
gypsies on their feet
pick its flowers
to adorn their heads;
I don't disagree with him
excepting in one matter.

(*Kuruntokai* 208)

This one matter is to be inferred from the inset which serves as a simile. The native elements brought in here are those of Kur̥incittinai. The Vēṅkai tree thrown down by the thoughtless elephant continues to blossom and its branches are easily reached by the girls. The lady whose grievance is voiced in the poem has had a happy time with the hero who is now unaware of the harm done to her because he has been delaying the wedding. She has become an easy victim of public slander.

In what is called Cuṭṭu Uḷḷurai, one thing is pointed at to yield a hidden sense.

Hail Thee! O Cloud,
Would you scoop water from the sea,
bend the dark vaulting welkin,
thunder like a war drum,
and glitter like the sword unsheathed
in a fight against foes formidable
by kings just and competent,
only to end in sound and fury?
Or would you save by rain
the millet field
guarded by the gypsy girl
moving gaily with her friends
wearing Vēṅkai flowers densely lined with
fire-like ceyalai leaves
scaring parrots by sound and stone?

(Akanānūru 188)

The heroine's girl friend asks the cloud if it is going to thunder in vain or will save the millet crop by raining. The message is, in fact, meant for the hero who is expected to say whether the slander caused by his frequent visits will be allowed to continue or whether he will put an end to it by marrying the lady. Though ostensibly an apostrophe to the cloud, it is addressed to the hero and hence falls within the category of Cuṭṭu Uḷḷurai.

In Nakai Uḷḷurai, there is a tinge of humour in the admonition that the hero has to think of an early wedding.

His palms spotless
as the petal

at the pollen center
 of lotuses
 that grow in old waters
 where others play
 his mouth lovely as coral
 making sweet baby talk
 not yet uttered by tongue,
 he makes everyone laugh.
 Enchanting everyone,
 he was playing alone in the street
 with his toy chariot,
 our son wearing gold ornaments –
 when that woman of yours,
 burdened with gold
 teeth sharp and lovely,
 seeing your likeness in him,
 thinking there was no one watching,
 bent down happily
 and called out to him,
 “come here, my love!”
 and clasped him to her young breasts
 borne down with necklaces.
 Seeing her,
 I couldn’t move
 but when she turned to me,
 I held her close and I said,
 “you young innocent,
 don’t be shy
 you too are a mother to him.”
 Her face fell
 as one confessing a theft;
 she stood scratching the ground
 with her toenails.
 Looking at her state,
 didn’t I too love her then,
 thinking
 “she’s like the powerful goddess in the sky
 goddess of chaste wives,
 and fit to be mother to your son?”

(*Akanānūru* 16)

In this piece, the hero is reprimanded by his wife, who, after meeting

his concubine in strange circumstances, tells him that the other woman also appeared fit to be the mother of their son. In the course of her long speech describing her encounter with the concubine, she indicates her awareness of his relationship with the latter and sarcastically calls that unchaste woman Aruntati, the archetype of chastity.

Tolkāppiyam mentions 'Cīrappu' as one of the reasons for the use of similes. "Cīrappu Nalane"(1225). Here Cīrappu may be taken to mean aggrandizement. The intensity of the lady's love is subtly expressed in Cīrappu Ullurai in words that apparently denote anger, ignorance, jealousy or poverty.

When pollen grains that fell
from the fragrant hair of concubines
are seen on your shoulders
who are you to touch us?
are they that bear no parting
slaves to the hard-hearted?

(*Kalittokai* 88)

The lady here forbids her husband to touch her as he has been away spending his time with concubines. But her angry words fail to hide the fact that however cruel his insensitive nature may be, she is incapable of bearing the agony of separation from him.

All that *Tolkāppiyar* says about poetry and his inclusion of the concept of *Nōkku* which expects that every word in a poem must contribute to the meaning and significance of the whole, make it clear that he conceives a poem as an organic whole. In the West, Coleridge and the New Critics of the twentieth century following in his footsteps are known to have contended that a poem must be one in which the parts mutually support and explain each other, all in their proportion harmonizing with and supporting the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement. While reading a great poem, according to Coleridge, the reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution but by the pleasurable activity of mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself. Any reader of a *Caṅkam* poem would attest that this is his experience.

The ideal modern poem is expected to be objective, precise, organically complex and as well-written as prose. Free from clichés

and straddled adjectives, it should have the prose virtues of simplicity and hardness in a language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree. Edwardian and Georgian poetry was rejected because it lacked subtlety, complexity and depth. A poem of indirection, yielding more than one layer of meaning, is a product of excellent craftsmanship. Tolkāppiyar's insistence on the three aspects, *Nōkku*, *Payan* and *Eccam*, is clearly indicative of his predilection for a poetry that works subtly, indirectly and suggestively. *Nōkku* demands every syllable, every word and every line to be in harmony with the poem as a whole. By *payan* is meant the implicit statement on the purpose of an object. Though *Eccam*, which is of two types – *Colleccam* and *Kurippeccam* – is interpreted in diverse ways by the commentators, it is used to avoid explicit complete statements and to exploit the suggestive potential of the minimum number of words employed in the poem.

Tolkāppiyar's theory of poetry as expressed in his "Poruḷatikaram" and the practice of Caṅkam Poets as evidenced in the still cherished anthologies would reveal that the ancient Tamil poets had a very rich and highly sophisticated set of notions of poetry which the West could conceive of only after numerous experiments and prolonged discussions and debates.

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3. *PURANĀNŪRU*: A REPERTOIRE OF POETIC FORMS, THEMES AND MOTIFS

Leaving out man-woman love which is the exclusive subject matter of Akam poems, *Puranānūru*, in its four hundred stanzas of varied lengths, deals with almost all the aspects of life on earth such as war, fame, poverty, philanthropy, friendship, education, sense of shame, fear of blame, life of a householder, renunciation, children, farming, widowhood, chastity and transitoriness of youth, life and wealth. From the songs written under the categories of *tiṇais* like *karantai*, *Kāñci*, *Kaikkilai*, *tumpai*, *nocci*, *pātāṇ*, *peruntinai*, *potuviyal*, *vañci*, *vākai*, *veṭci* and of sixty odd *tuṇais* ranging from *aracavākai* to *vēttiyaḷ*, several succeeding generations of poets got numerous literary forms, themes, motifs, not to speak of similes, metaphors, images and symbols. Some of the sub-genres and motifs which Tamil gained thus later spread to other Indian languages including Sanskrit. So far as Tamil is concerned, it is easily discernible that besides developing splendid subgenres like *āruppaṭai*, *tūtu*, *paraṇi*, *palliyelucci*, and *kāñci*, it profited by the enrichment of its didactic literature and *bhakti* writings which are heavily indebted to *Puranānūru*.

One of Picirāntaiyār's poems, in praise of Kōpperuñcōlan, requests a swan to serve as an envoy and convey his message to the king.

Gander! I call out to you! Gander! I call out to you!

Here I stand idle in the evening when things become unclear and the blossoming light of the moon once it has united its two horns shines out like the glowing face of that hero triumphant, murderous in battle, bestowing grace upon his own land!

If you, after feeding on loaches from the great bay of Kanyakumari should fly off to the mountain of the far north and stopping on your way in the fine land of the king of the *cholas* you should go to the towering mansion at Kōlī accompanied by your youthful beloved and enter that palace without even stopping at the gate and if you should say, loud enough for the great king Kilī to hear you, "Āntai of

Picir is your humble servant!," then when you have done that he will give you the gift of a fine ornament he treasures so that your beautiful mate may wear it and she will be filled with delight!

(*Puranānūru* 67)

In *Narriṇai*, three poems employ this strategy to express the heroine's experience of the pangs of separation from her lover. In an *Akanānūru* piece by Maturaikkalḷil Kaṭaiyattan Venṇākaṇār, the heroine sends a crab as her messenger to her lover.

O crab, you are my only incomparable support because neither the grove nor the salt-pond nor the sweet-smelling punṇai haunted by the bees will convey my message. You must meet the one in whose land a swarm of bees fed on the honey from the neytal flowers of the big salt pond are too inebriated to fly and must tell him, "At the dead of night when the small crow of the sea-shore, perched on a branch of the thāzhai, feeling frustrated, dreams of eating prawns with its beloved female companion, how can the lady that removed your misery overcome hers?

(*Akanānūru* 170)

The "ceyyuḷiyal" of *Tolkāppiyam* lists the two sets of characters who have the right to hear and to speak:

The sun, moon, mind, coyness,
The sea, grove, animals, trees,
The sad moment, birds, heart,
And others besides these
Are presented,
In keeping with the norms set,
As if they spoke.
As if they listened;
So have the learned said.

(*ceyyuḷiyal* 192)

This tradition and the *Puṇam* and *Akam* poems mentioned above were responsible for the birth of the subgenre called *tūtu* in Tamil. Kalidasa, who is now reported to have been influenced by Caṅkam literature, wrote his immortal *Mēghadūtam*, in which the hero pleads with the clouds to convey his agony to his lady-love living far away. Because of the remarkable success of this poem, more than fifty messenger-poems came into being in Sanskrit. The Jain poets used this genre to express their religious and

philosophical ideas in verse. Bhamaha of the seventh century condemned the poetic device of sending the cloud, the wind, the moon, the beetle, the parrot and other such lower beings as messengers since the poets would thereby be committing the fallacy of *anaucitya*. But his strictures were rightly ignored by poets in Sanskrit and Malayalam who merrily continued to cultivate this exquisite literary form. Bhamaha's condemnation is indicative of the fact that the roots of this tradition were not there in early Sanskrit poetry. The impact of Kalidasa's work is to be found in later Malayalam writings in the *maṇipravāḷa* style like *Uṇṇuṇṇīli cantēcam*, *Kōkacantēcam* and *Kākacantēcam*.

In Tamil messenger-poems, a god or a king or a chieftain became the hero whose glory was sung in the form of a message sent to him through an envoy. Philosophy replaced such encomiums in Umāpati Civam's *Neñcu Viṭu Tūtu*, Tattuvarāyar's *Neñcu Viṭu Tūtu* and Civaprakācar's work of the same title, the first two of which were written in the fourteenth century and the last in the seventeenth century. There was a strange development in the tradition when the messenger became the subject of praise in *Tamil Viṭu Tūtu*, a landmark in the history of *tūtu* poems.

The colophons for nine poems of *Puranānūru* (Nos 194, 357, 359, 360, 362-6) state they are of *peruṅkāñcitturai*, which, according to *Purapporuḷ venṇāmālai*, describe the ephemerality of life. The *tiṇai* called *kāñci* and its *tuṇais* are briefly defined in *Tolkāppiyam*:

Kāñci is the *puṇam*
parallel to the *Peruntiṇai*
of *akam*.
Peruṅkāñci that states
the certainty of death;
Mutukāñci that reveals
the truths of life
which the wise taught the young;
Maṇakkāñci that shows
the daring death of a soldier
after he tears open the wound
received in the battle;
Pēykkāñci that pictures
the devils guarding the wounded;
Maṇṇaikkāñci that pities

the slain soldier praising his deeds;
 Vañciṇakkāñci that sketches
 one vowing to degenerate
 if a deed is not done;
 Toṭākkāñci that displays
 a charming wife stopping the devils
 from nearing her wounded man;
 Āñcikkāñci that portrays
 the wife killing herself with
 the spear that killed her husband;
 Makatpārkkāñci that describes
 a chieftain's refusal to give
 his daughter in marriage to another;
 And the one that speaks of
 the end of a lady nestling
 her face and breasts against
 the head of her dead husband;
 These ten, they say, are kāñci themes.

Of the *peruñkāñci* poems in *Puranānūru*, the one sung by Kāvattānār advises Antuvan to earn a name in this world by giving since what happened to the great conquerors that reached the graveyard at the end might happen to him in the near future. Vāṇmīkiyār's poem stresses the impermanence of a king's state by pointing out that this world has seen seven rulers during a single day. When three kings of the Chera, Chola and Pandya dynasties were found together, Avvaiyar is reported to have told them that when a ruler leaves the world, his land won't go with him but would be captured by strangers if they have done good. The strategy adopted by Tāyaṅkaṇṇanār in his poem, cited as an example of the *turai* called *kāṭuvālttu* by the two commentators, Iḷampūraṇar and Naccinārkkīyār, is noteworthy.

Across it spreads the jungle. Upon it thick spurge grows. There in broad daylight the owls cry out and demon women open their mouths wide. The cremation fires glow and clouds of smoke cover that fearful burning ground. Hot, white ashes on the earth littered with bones are quenched by tears of lovers, weeping, their hearts full of longing. It has seen the back of every human being, all the people living in this world as they go away, but no one has ever seen it turn its back and go away.

(*Puranānūru* 356)

A poem by Mārkkanṭēyanār, falling under the category of *Peruṅkāñci*, states that Mother Earth, the very personification of patience, being unable to bear the grief of transience of life, burst into tears.

Her face is like the sky marked with the immense confusion of a storm and her eyes are like the two huge moving spheres as the earth goddess weeps, she who is so virtuous, crying out, “I do not pass away as former kings have done, their power so immense they found no new enemies, as they rolled their chariot wheels that are beautiful, of gold, with sapphire spokes and hubs of diamond over the ocean so difficult to cross, where even the shifting wind does not go! No, I remain here like a whore, while many who praise me wish that I may long endure!” The *kāñci* odes of grief and mourning have even reached that far, those say who know these things!

(*Puranānūru* 365)

Cūlāmoli also compares Mother Earth with the courtesan that frequently changes her masters and keeps going even after they disappear.

If you earnestly ask of the nature of Lady Earth,
Men of shapely, stone-like shoulders with fair wreaths,
She is not concerned with clan or character, but
Will go the way of those that have winning strategies.

Kings, more numerous than the sands in her,
Have known her, men of mighty armies, she
Went also with those that kept coming later;
She hasn’t changed; such is her nature still.

Over the crowned kings with winning spears
She has no claims, none she loves,
Will be with those that seize her; this is
The nature of the old dame dressed in seas.

When the one that ruled her many kings falling
At his feet is writhing on the other side of the ground
She will marry on this side another young man
Amidst thundering drums; this is her chastity!

(*Cūlāmoli* 2087–90)

Since Māṅkuṭimarutanār urges the King Talaiyālāṅkānattuc ceruveṇṇa Neṭuñceliyaṇ to follow the path of virtue realizing life is short, his poem is supposed to belong to *Poruṇmolikkāñci*. The poet doesn’t say that one should renounce life since it is transitory but that the way to conquer this transitoriness is to attain fame by helping others. What he observes here is

repeated in his magnum opus, *Maturaikkāñci*, a poem of 782 lines, which, praying for his long life, instructs him to keep in mind that only virtue is long-lasting in this ephemeral world and that his first aim should be to make the world happy by sticking to the path of virtue.

In the fourth section of the *Vishnu Purana* in Sanskrit, the impact of the Purāṇa poems that ask the rulers to realize that though several generations of beings may come and go, the earth will stay on and come under the control of many, is evident.

Kings, who with perishable fames have possessed this ever-enduring world, and, who, blinded with deceptive notions of individual occupation, have indulged the feeling that suggests, "This earth is mine, – it is my son's – it belongs to my dynasty," – have all passed away.... Earth laughs, as if smiling with autumnal flowers to behold her kings unable to effect the subjugation of themselves." The passage includes a song of the Earth, recited to a disciple named Maitreya, of which the name Hamatreya is a variation. It concludes: "These were the verses, Maitreya, which Earth recited and by listening to which ambition fades away like snow before the wind."

(Emerson, *Journals*, VII, 127–130)

Having been attracted by this passage in the *Vishnu Purana*, Emerson makes use of this motif in his "Hamatreya."

Hear what the Earth says:

Earth-Song

Mine and yours;
 Mine, not yours.
 Earth endures;
 Stars abide –
 Shine down in the old sea;
 Old are the shores;
 But where are old men?
 I who have seen much,
 Such have I never seen.
 ...
 Here is the land,
 Shaggy with wood,

With its old valley,
Mound and flood
But the heritors?
Fled like the flood's foam.
The lawyer and the laws,
And the kingdom,
Clean swept herefrom.

They called me theirs,
Who so controlled me;
Yet every one
Wished to stay and is gone,
How am I theirs,
If they cannot hold me,
But I hold them?

When I heard the Earth – song
I was no longer brave;
My avarice cooled
Like lust in the chill of the grave (104-05)

The great American thinker and poet was familiar with the Sanskrit classics and puranas but might not have known that the source of such a treatment of the theme of impermanence is to be found in *Purānānūru*.

Some of the saint poets in Tamil, especially, Māṇikkavācakar, Tōṇṭaratiṭṭoṭi āḷwar and Āṇṭāl, have to their credit poems which appeal to Lord Siva or to Lord Vishnu to wake up from their sleep as the day has dawned and to bless their devotees. These poems, assigned to the subgenre called Paḷḷiyelucci, are indebted to *Purānānūru*. Singing the glory of Amparkilān Aruvantai, Kallāṭanār opens his poem with a lovely description of the daybreak.

As the silver planet appeared and the calls of the birds were heard at the break of dawn, I did not appear at his gateway of praise his many plowing oxen! But when he heard the music of my taṭāri drum with its broad eye sounding at the doorways of other kings, he felt kindness toward me and wishing my poverty to vanish, he stripped me of the threadbare garment around my waist that the dust of the earth

was consuming and he clothed me in white and he banished my hunger!

May the overlord of Ampar where the fields grow their paddy and the water of the kāviri river laps into the low-lying land of the gardens, ... the mountain of victory.

(*Puranānūru* 385)

Māṇikkavācakar's *Tiruppalliyēlucchi*, consisting of ten long ācīriya viruttams, begs the Lord to wake up and bless his devotees. The third stanza of the poem reminds us of the *Puranānūru* piece.

Kuyils have sung, cocks have crowed,
 Birds have chirped, conches have blown,
 Stars have lost their luster; light
 Illumines the dawn eagerly; show us
 Lord, your anklet-worn feet; glorious
 Siva residing at Tirupperunturai
 Beyond the reach of anyone's mind,
 To us you are of easy access!
 Great god! Arising from the bed grace us!

In Assamese, the type of musical composition characterized by sublime thought and spiritual idealism and tuned to classical rāgas is known as Bargīta (noble song). The Vaishnavite tradition classifies Bargītas under several categories including (1) Paramārtha-gita (songs of spiritual significance), (2) Virakti-gita (songs of detachment), (3) Viraha-gita (songs of the agony of separation from the Lord and Krishna), (4) Jāgaraṇa-gita (songs of awakening Krishna in the morning), (5) Calana-gita (songs of movement to Vrindavana to tend cows), (6) Khelana-gita (depicting sports of Krishna), (7) Cauracāhuri-gita (depicting Krishna stealing milk and butter and his naughty behaviour with the milk-maids).

The following is an English prose-rendering of a Jāgaraṇa-gita by Madhavdev:

O Consort of Kamala, give up your morning sleep; let me see your moon-like face. The night has vanished, the four quarters are clear and the sun's rays have appeared tearing asunder the veil of darkness. Hundred petalled lotuses (śatapatra) are in full bloom with black bees hovering over them. The milk maids of Braja are churning milk singing your glory. Dama and Sudama are calling you.

Behold, Balaram too has come out of the sleeping chamber. Nanda has left for the cattle-pen and the milk-men had gone to the herds.

Awake and arise, therefore, O Gopala, and go for tending cows. Taking pails of milk and butter as well as your horn, stick and flute, release the calves and the lowing cows early. Madhava says – O mother Yasodha, what penance did you practice as to get the Lord of the three worlds as your cowherd boy (K.M. George 163.64).

The journey of the *palliyelucci* songs from *Puranānūru* has been wide and long in space and time.

It is clear that a handful of minor literary forms that speak in praise of kings in certain characteristic ways have been originally derived from *Puranānūru*. What is known as *prasasti* or *meykkīrtti* catalogues the activities and achievements of a king. This may be found inscribed in stones. *Tacāṅkam* and *Cīṇṇappū* describe the ten insignia of a king: law, country, city, river, garland, horse, elephant, drum, hill, weapon. *Aṭṭamaṅkalam* lists the eight auspicious things to be seen by the king; *perumaṅkalam* greets him on his birthday; *Cātakam* mentions his birth in verse; *Kaṭikai venpā* tells him the time of the day.

These are the subjects ascribed to some *turai*s mentioned in *Puranānūru*: A king's character and victories are celebrated in *aracavākai*; the greatness of his ancestors is attributed to him in *iyaḷmoḷi*; his royal umbrella is eulogized in *kuṭaimaṅkalam*; his horse's heroism is sung in *kutiraimaram*; his compassion, charity, power and brilliance are stated in *pāṭaṇpāṭtu*; the ancient history of his ancestors is narrated in *mutalvañci*; his sword is glorified in *vāṇmaṅkalam*; he is hailed in *vāḷttiyaḷ*; his philanthropy is acclaimed in *vāḷttu*. *Kuruṅkoliyūr kiḷār*'s poem on *Māntarañcēral Irumporai* is a typical example of these songs.

From Cape Kumari in the south, from the great mountain
in the north, from the oceans on the east and on the west,
the hills, the mountains, the woods and the fields
in unison utter their praise of you!
You who protect us! You, who are descended
from those who ruled the world,
their gleaming wheels rolling free, you
who avoid cruelty and hold your rod erect,
are impartial and take only what is your due!
Murderous warrior who governs those living in cool

Tonṭi with its low-hanging coconut clusters, wide fields
 its mountain boundary and broad seashore where the sand
 is like moonlight and there are flowers like fire
 in the clear backwaters! As a killer elephant with long tusks,
 very large, very strong, might disdain to notice
 the cover over an elephant trap and be caught
 in the deep pit and then destroy that hole
 so that it cannot be used again, rejoining
 his herd which is filled then with relief,
 so, through your irresistible strength, you escaped,
 overcoming your discomfiture, and many who had been
 deeply despairing rejoiced! And praise of you
 was sung on high before a multitude of nobles
 of exalted family, while enemy kings served you,
 calculating that they might gain rich land you had captured
 or fine jewels that had come to you if only
 your heart were gracious toward them, but more profoundly
 they thought, "we will lose our high walls with the flags
 upraised on them, we will lose our broad fortresses protected
 with their outposts, should he glance at us in anger!"
 and they serve you because of your might and glory
 which I have come to see and to praise, O greatness!
 You whose army has so many shields that the people,
 bewildered, see them as massed clouds, and so many
 enormous elephants that the honey bees
 take them for mountains, an army so hugely swollen
 your enemies are terrified, so like the ocean that the clouds
 try to draw water from it! You whose royal drum is like thunder
 shattering the heads of snakes whose venom
 is hidden within their fangs! Boundless benefactor ruling those
 of the west!

(*Puranānūru* 17).

This poem, which has *aracavākai* or *iyalmoli* as its *tuṟai*, has the characteristic features of a *meykkīrtti*. Such pieces in *Puranānūru* were responsible for the birth of *prasasti* kavyas in Prakrit and Sanskrit. Literary historians are of the view that the Sanskrit *prasasti* contributed to the growth of Indian literary tradition. More than fifteen *prasastis*, each consisting of ten to one hundred stanzas, written in a style mixing prose and verse are available to the present historians. Harisena's *Prasasti* found in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta gives, in eight stanzas, an account of the death of Chandragupta I, who, while in his death-bed chose Samudragupta as his descendant. The anxiety of ministers before the heir—

apparent was chosen, the disappointment of the other princes after the choice was made and the words uttered at the moment of nomination (“you will become the ruler and save the world”) are all subtly expressed in the *prasasti*. The style of these stanzas characterised by simplicity, clarity, realism and sweetness later developed into what is known as *vaidarbhi*. The long prose sentence that comes at the end describes the greatness of Samudragupta who won several wars. This is supposed to be the longest sentence in Sanskrit. One should remember here that there are many poems in *Puranānūru* which consist of single long sentences. Harisena’s *Prasasti Kavya* ends with a poem that prays for public welfare.

Considered to be valuable historical documents, each of these Sanskrit *prasastis* begins with an invocation, glorifies the king and his ancestry, states why the stone with the inscription was erected, pleads with the public to protect the stone, mentions the names of the one who built it, the priest who consecrated it, the author of the *kavya* and the sculptor who inscribed it together with the date of inscription.

The inscriptional literature in Kannada may also be found to be based on the poems in *Puranānūru*. According to Prabhu Shankara, “the original source of Kannada poetry is traceable to the stone inscriptions of Karnataka, the first of them being the Halmidi inscription of about A.D 450.” (George 200).

The *srāvaṇa beḷagoḷa* inscription of A.D. 700 about the Jain monk Nandisena has a verse in the *vṛtta* metre:

Like the rainbow, like the wavy web fretted on the heavens by the tongues of lightning, and like the mist, heaps of riches, immense beauty and great glory appear for a moment and disappear instantly. They do not stay long with anyone. Valuing as I do the ultimate end, I will not remain here on this earth. So resolving, did Nandisena, the great ascetic, embrace *sanyasa* and attained the world of gods (George 200).

The following is one of the verses in the native *tripadi* metre found in the *Bādāmi* inscription (c.A.D.700), praising Arabhaṭṭa as a great hero:

Mild to him that was mild, sweet-tempered to him that was sweet-tempered, he was yet a terrible foe to the trouble-maker; he was Madhava himself and none else (George 200).

The impact of *Puranānūru* on such verses is quite evident. In one of her poems on Atiyamān Neṭumān Añci, Avvaiyar says,

As is a great elephant settling into the water to clean his white tusks at a bathing site for the little children of a town, so sweet you are for us, O greatness! But like that elephant when he has entered into rut, dangerous to touch, O greatness, you are other than sweet to your enemies!

(*Puranānūru* 94)

It may be recalled here that Ramanuja in his *Gita Bhāṣya* uses Avvaiyār's image of the elephant to describe God's kindness to the good and His cruelty to the wicked.

The three poems by Nakkaṇṇaiyār on Pōravaikkōpperu Narkillī are stated to be of Paliccutal turai under Kaikkilaittinai. From these poems, some draw the conclusion that she was in love with him though it was not reciprocated. Naccinārkkiniyar is of the view that *Puranānūru* 83 ("Aṭipunai toṭukaḷal maiyaṇar kālai") is by a daughter of Perunkoli nāykan, who gives a passionate expression to her unrequited love and that it lacks decorum. *Puranānūru* 84 is cited by Pērāciriyar as an example of Penpārkaikkilai (one-sided love on the part of a woman) and by Naccinārkkiniyar as one of Pāṭaṇṭinaikkaikkilai in which no name is mentioned.

These puram poems and the few *kaikkilai* poems found in the Akam anthologies had a tremendous impact on Indian literature during the Bhakti movement. Alwars and Nayanmars could compose immortal pieces expressing their love for God in the *Kaikkilai* tradition. The role of their poems in the spreading of the Bhakti movement from region to region and in the growth of Bhakti literature in various Indian languages is well-known.

There are several didactic poems in *Puranānūru*. In the poems falling under the turai called Ceviyarivuruu (Nos 2,3,5,6,35,40,55,184), didacticism becomes open and prominent. Many other poems also teach certain truths about life. Ceviyarai or Ceviyarivuruu is defined by ḷampūraṇar as dinning into the ears of some one the lesson that it is one's duty to be restrained and humble in the midst of the elders. Naccar also describes it in a similar manner. Resorting to diverse techniques, poets may state morals as morals openly or express them through images and symbols or act them out in dramatic scenes or teach them by realistic representation of characters and incidents from life. Their first aim is to

indicate how to live this life on earth as it ought to be lived. They advise that though life is miserable it has to be accepted in its totality and lived properly. Very few recommend rejection of life on the ground that it is transient or full of woe. It is very often underscored that attempting to attain glory through charitable deeds is the best guiding principle one can have. Ethical works stressing such instructions grew in number as centuries passed by.

The Caṅkam poets did not hesitate to counsel the kings and to admonish them when they went wrong. According to *Purapporuḷ venpāmālai*, Ceviyaṛivuṛuu is meant for teaching the kings noble thoughts. Verses 2,3,5,6,35,40,55 and 184 tell the kings how they should conduct themselves. The king is asked to be conscious of his responsibility, to do everything to keep his land fertile, to patronize arts by liberally helping all artists and to save the poor from poverty. Though he is praised for his victories, he is warned against indulging in too many wars and causing mindless destruction. The one lesson that these poems teach everyone is that it is glorious to enjoy the pleasures of life by leading a virtuous life.

Tirukkuraḷ, and the other works in the anthology called *Paṭiṇeṅkīlkanakku*, are all indebted to *Puranānūru* for their ideas and literary excellence. Kauṭaliyam, Cukranīti, Nīticatakam and other such ethical writings in Sanskrit have now been found to owe not a little to *Tirukkuraḷ*. Western missionaries and scholars like F.W. Ellis and G.U. Pope were first attracted by the ethical works in Tamil whose quality and quantity impressed them. G.U. Pope, who has translated *Tirukkuraḷ*, *Nālaṭiṃyār* and select stanzas from *Puranānūru* and *Purapporuḷvenpāmālai*, testifies to their excellence.

Regarding the originality of the world-view presented in *Puranānūru* and its place as literature, what George Hart observes may be taken as the final word on the subject:

Yet for all this, the basic culture and outlook of the poems are apparently indigenous and only superficially influenced by North Indian ideas... The same appears to be true for the poems' literary meters, forms and themes, which were clearly taken from the oral literature of the bards and drummers...

The majority of the poems seem to owe little to the major traditions of North India. Their meters are utterly unlike Sanskrit meters, which are

based on number of syllables rather than cumulative quantity, and their flow is different..... They share many significant elements with the Northern literature – conventions, figures of speech and even cultural ideas that cannot be traced to Northern sources (Hart xxxi – xxxii).

Further research based on this finding will reveal that *Puranānūru* has served as a valuable source of poetic forms, themes and motifs to many other Indian literatures as well as to Tamil writings that succeeded *Puranānūru*.

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- The Puranānūru* . Translated and edited by Hart, George L. and Hank Heifetz. Penguin Books, 2002. The English versions of all the *Puranānūru* poems quoted in the essay are from this text.

4. IS PURANĀNŪRU HEROIC POETRY?

It may be fruitful to examine Puram poems in the light of what the Western literary historians have said about the Heroic Age and oral poetics. As early as the last decade of the nineteenth century, the Russian scholar, Radlov, studying the Tartars of Central Asia, identified certain elements of production employed by the bards of heroic poetry. They consisted of themes, situations, catalogues, topoi or descriptions of the birth of a hero or of weapons, portraits of people and the beauty of a bride. In the presence of an audience, a bard, mixing these static components with lines invented for the nonce, recited his poems. The Chadwicks in their monumental work entitled *The Growth of Literature* pointed out that in the Heroic Age, literature must have consisted of records of intellectual activities preserved in speech, not in writing and that it continued to supply themes when, later, new literary forms grew up as man's memory served as his library. The heroic records, for the sake of analysis, might be divided into the following five types: (A) Narrative Poetry (B) (i) poems whose interest lies in emotional situations arising from adventure rather than in adventure itself (ii) Lyrics (iii) Odes (Poems of didactic interest (D) (i) Elegies (ii) Panegyrics (iii) Poetry of invocation (iv) Exhortations to battle (v) Celebrations of victory (E) Personal poetry.

Surveying Greek, Sanskrit, Celtic, Turkish, Pacific and African records, the Chadwicks contend that certain themes and techniques are universal in oral traditions. Most of the poems of Type B consist wholly or almost wholly of speeches in which familiar static epithets, repetitions and recurrent formulae are not infrequent. Though there can be no doubt that Type C was cultivated during the Heroic Age and is found everywhere in one form or another, heroic characteristics are wholly wanting in the gnomes all of which almost relate to human experiences and especially to human acts in their moral aspect. Poems of Type D consist partly of elegies upon dead heroes and partly of panegyrics upon princes who are represented as still alive and are concerned primarily at least with the valour and virtues of the heroes whom they celebrate. Invocations and prayers to deities occur

in the Homeric poems and are generally very short. They appear to have been composed as introductions to recitations of epic poetry at festivals and many consist of an invocation to a deity followed by a few lines about his attributes, parentage and sanctuaries. Invocations occur frequently in fragments of early lyric and elegiac poems and sometimes in oaths. Though we don't have examples of Type E, we cannot conclude that such a poetry was not cultivated during the Heroic Age. This poetry deals with the poet's own feelings or experiences or with persons in immediate relationship with him or things which have come under his observation but which are not of general significance.

The most striking element in the religion of classical Greece, according to H.M. Chadwick, is the worship of heroes. Every city had shrines, at which sacrifices, similar to the ones for chthonic deities, were offered to heroes. Many of these heroes were local persons whose tombs became shrines. But the protagonists of heroic poetry were sometimes worshipped in many different states. Thirst for fame during one's life-time and in after-life is one of the major themes of Greek and Teutonic heroic poetry. There is also evidence to indicate that a belief approximating to the doctrine of *Valhalla* was prevalent during the Heroic Age. It was not lawful for a man of the period to die of old age or disease. When he felt that he was dying he would request his relatives to kill him as early as possible. They would then construct a huge pyre and place him at the highest part of it so that he might be stabbed to death by a compatriot. The dead man's wife would also be required to strangle herself at the tomb. Another notable feature of heroic poetry is that it never brings into prominence the national aspect of war. The heroes fought to achieve personal glory and to display personal prowess. They were also motivated by the desire for plunder of women and cattle. The hero wanting to outshine all his rivals in splendour desired wealth not to live a life of comfort or to gain a position of influence but to display it.

Milman Parry, called "the Darwin of Homeric Studies", juxtaposing Homer and modern Yugoslav bards, pointed out the similarities in their techniques of oral verse-making in so far as they drew on a *Kunstsprache*, a repertoire of formulas, patterns, themes and type-scenes. In the oral tradition, the bards liberally help themselves from the stock of metrically fitting phrases such as the epithet plus noun to describe heroes, objects, animals, birds, etc. Examining the first twenty five lines of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, he identified the traditional formulas used in them and got

repeated in the rest of the epics. Defining a formula as a group of words which is regularly employed under the metrical conditions to express a given essential idea, he demonstrated how it fills just the space in the verse which allows it to be joined to the phrases which go before and after and which with it make the sentence.

In his *Heroic Poetry*, C.M. Bowra describes the salient features of the heroic age and of its oral narratives. At most times and in most places heroic poetry is treated seriously by social historians as it is taken to be a repository of facts. Heroic poetry exists in many parts of the world and has existed in many others because it answers a real need of the human spirit. The heroic age is one which believes in the pursuit of honour and expresses its admiration in a poetry of action and adventure, of bold endeavors and noble examples. Every society in the heroic age held that life of action is superior to the pursuit of profit, or the gratification of the senses and that the man who seeks honour is himself an honourable figure. It is not enough for a man to possess superior qualities; he must realize them in action. In the ordeals of life, the hero's full worth is tested and revealed. It is not necessary that he should have achieved success. The hero who dies in battle after doing his utmost is in some respects more admirable than he who lives. He is honoured because he has made a final effort in courage and endurance. Honour is central to a hero's being and when it is questioned or assailed he has to assert himself. The assertion of honour need not always be fierce and blood-thirsty; it may be equally effective if it is quiet.

Since the ideal of action appeals to a large number of men and provides enthralling experience, it becomes matter for poetry of a special kind. Bowra observes that heroic poetry is essentially narrative and nearly always remarkable for its objective character. It wins interest and admiration for its heroes by showing what they are and what they do. The actions related in heroic poetry are primarily those of human beings, not of gods and goddesses. Almost without exception heroic poetry is mainly intended for a listening and not a reading public. Anonymity is a characteristic of heroic poetry. Explaining the anonymity of oral poems, Bowra contends that each poem has one existence when it is recited, when the audience knows who the poet is. Heroic songs may be sung by kings and princes also. Though bards sing for kings and princes, their songs are enjoyed by the whole gathering and create a special diversion in courtly life. The bards are satisfied with giving a new variation of an old tale; their main task is to maintain a tradition in the correct way. As heroic songs are an important

link between the ruler and the ruled whose common interest in war they reflect, they are more than a mere pastime. In war the bard comes into his own more than in peace since he is able to inspire his own countrymen against the enemy by singing songs of their glorious past. Fighting is, of course, the favourite topic of heroic poetry. Another notable feature of heroic narrative is that on the whole it concentrates on the happy few and neglects the others. Though heroic poetry may introduce gods into the action, its main interest is in man.

Bowra acknowledges the presence of written poems by literate writers even during the heroic age. Heroic poetry, he says, often exists in societies where writing is practiced in some form. The decline of heroic poetry is caused by historical developments. Foreign conquests or religious movements or cultural influences from abroad may in a short time put an end to what has endured for many centuries. Describing the poetry of the post-heroic age, Bowra says that a society changes its taste and advances from the simple to the elaborate or from the communal to the personal and that men who have been hitherto content to enjoy a traditional and conventional art now feel a need for something more original and more varied.

Such findings by the Western scholars about the heroic age have tempted some of the Tamil scholars, notably K. Kailasapathy, to identify the Caṅkam age as a heroic one. Encouraged by the suggestion of Parry that in addition to long oral narratives, even the short lyrical, nonheroic pieces by writers like Homer, Hesiod, Sappho and others follow the formulaic style, the great Ceylon scholar has been quick to marshal all possible arguments to reveal the 'heroic' nature of Tamil Puṛam poems. As early as 1927, N.K. Siddhanta in his *Heroic Age of India* had observed that the Puṛam poems in Tamil were comparable to the heroic poems in other languages. In his lectures entitled *Kāviya Kālam* (1952) S. Vaiyapuripillai had stated that some of the characteristic features of the heroic age as described by Chadwick are to be found in the society pictured in the early Caṅkam poems. J.R. Mar in his Ph.D. thesis on *Eṭṭuttokai* submitted to London University in 1958 contended that early Tamil poetry, very much like the Greek lyrics of the past, might have been of the oral tradition. Following in their footsteps, Kailasapathy did further research in the area and came out with his *Tamil Heroic Poetry* (1968) which claimed that the evidence of the early Tamil poems is very close to the findings of modern researchers of oral poetry. Analyzing the first thirty lines of *Mullāippaṭṭu*, he identified

a few noun-epithets and formulae that get repeated in the Caṅkam poems. In his view, the *Akavalpā* of our *Akam* and *Puram* poems is in many respects similar to the hexameter of the Greek epics. Even the great Caṅkam poets like Kapilar, Paraṇar, Avvaiyār and Māṅkuti Marutan are found to have repeated the words, phrases, themes, similes and metaphors used by others. Their poems, according to him, reveal no identifiable unique features but appear to have come from the same workshop since the commonness of the style is so predominant. Motifs such as stealing the cow, burning the enemy's city and feasting are to be found in the ancient Welsh and Irish oral traditions also. Wherever there are references to songs in the Caṅkam corpus, they imply poems recited and not written. Words like *yāppu*, *Kiḷavi*, *Kūrru*, commonly used in the past, were associated more with speech than writing. Also Kailasapathy asserts that all the eight characteristics of heroic poetry as discussed by C.M. Bowra are true of Tamil *Puram* poems. The old Tamil concepts of *Nāṇ*, *Paḷi*, *Araṇ* as the distinguishing traits of heroes celebrated in them are again similar to the Greek concepts of *Aidos*, *Nemesis* and *Dike*, while the word *cāṇrōr* meaning the great corresponds to the Greek *Agathos*.

Kailasapathy's conclusion identifying *puram* poems as a product of the heroic age of Tamil has not gone unchallenged by contemporary Tamil scholarship. T.P. Meenakshisundaran, in what is believed to be the last of his major works, *Tamil Ilakkiya Varalāru: Caṅka Kālam* (1981), gives a brief historical-critical account of the golden era of Tamil literature and culture highlighting the grandeur of *Akam* and *Puram* lyrics. His contentions, though found scattered in the small book, constitute a quiet but firm rejection of Kailasapathy's thesis. He points out that Caṅkam literary tradition favours short individual poems but not continuous narratives, as from the Caṅkam age we haven't got any epics glorifying kings or great heroes. The Caṅkam age was one in which education flourished and literate poets from diverse castes and different walks of life were delighted to compose poems of their own. We may make bold to say that all the Caṅkam lyrics that are extant must have been sung by mentally well-equipped, wise poets and not by illiterate bards or minstrels. The conventions and the rules and regulations they have followed in the writing of these poems witness to their erudition. The bards might have continued to sing their own songs but they haven't come to us in the form of anthologies as the songs of *pāṇar*, *akavaṇ makaḷ* and *vēlaṇ* would not have enjoyed the status and prestige of the poems of *pulavar*, characterized by depth of thought and complexity.

According to T.P.M., pāṇar's songs in the oral tradition did influence the poems composed by the *pulavar* and that accounts for the presence of formulae, noun-epithets and other such oral elements in the latter. Chadwick and Bowra have themselves accepted that the heroic age was followed by one in which poets moved from the simple to the elaborate and from the communal to the personal. The heroic age was an age of long continuous poems, an age of narratives. We have neither of these in the Caṅkam Corpus. The heroic poem sings the past achievement of heroes. Though Caṅkam poems occasionally mention the great deeds of the past, they are largely about the authors' contemporaries. Since the epics of the heroic age were orally transmitted from generation to generation and continued to grow in size, we attribute communal authorship to them. But the Caṅkam poems certainly had their individual authors. Of the total of 2381 pieces we don't know the names of the authors of only 102 just because the palm-leaves bearing their names had been destroyed. This doesn't mean that those poems have to be treated as the authorless poems of the heroic age.

T.P.M. demonstrates with specific examples how many of the Caṅkam poems reveal the characteristic qualities of individual authors. One can't mistake a Kapilar poem for one by Māmūlanār; no one else writes like Pālaipāṭiya Peruṅkaṭuṅko. If we exclude *Kalittokai*, *Paripāṭal* and *Tirumurukārruppaṭai*, we are left with 2209 pieces which are undoubtedly of the Caṅkam age. Of these, 1705 are *akam* poems. Even according to Kailasapathi's reckoning, only 391 Caṅkam pieces refer to heroes or philanthropists or others. This means that more than 70 percent of the extant Caṅkam poems have nothing to do with heroes; they portray the emotions of men and women in the grip of love.

The great Tamil scholar cites numerous examples to show that Caṅkam poets, even when they use formulaic phrases, make the meaning profound and complex. Another feature of this poetry not to be found in the oral tradition is their use of *Aintiṇai* tradition from which they gain several advantages including brevity and economy of diction. Finally, T.P.M. examines a few pieces to show how the Caṅkam poets have gone far beyond the bardic tradition even when they glorify a king's heroism and generosity.

That some of T.P.M.'s clarifications are acceptable to A.K. Ramanujan is quite evident from his "Afterword" to his *Poems of Love and War*, where, without acknowledging the source, he echoes them in a critique on Kailasapathy's claims. A.K. Ramanujan also feels that in the poem, a

distinction is made between the *pulavar*, “wise men, philosopher-poets” and the other bards, minstrels, dancers, *pāṇar*, *virali*, etc. and that the latter are always *dramatis personae* in the poems, or speakers of monologue poems while the poems have clearly been composed by a *pulavar* with a name or epithet.

Repeating T.P.M.’s argument, Ramanujan observes that the authors of the poems and the nameless bards in the poems are not the same and that the poems are too subtle to be the result of rapid composition like oral epics. Questioning the validity of Parry’s belief that “formulaic” and “traditional” necessarily mean “oral”, Ramanujan says that in transitional periods, writing is used by literate poets to compose new work though the standards and techniques may be oral and formulaic. In *Caṅkam* poems the formulaic elements are not static counters, not fixed in meaning, but quite sensitive to usage and context. To prove this point, he mentions the formula “*Ācāku entai yāṇṭulaṇ kollō?*” (“Where is he gone, my lord and stay?”) which occurs four times, in elegies lamenting the death of a king and of an anonymous hero, and in love poems referring to the lover who is far away. In the elegies the question is rhetorical for the hero is dead, but in the love poem it is literal since the hero’s whereabouts are not known. *Caṅkam* poets are thus able to ring changes skilfully and, therefore, the strict meaning of the term ‘formula’ loses its rigour.

Ramanujan persuasively demonstrates how the frames indicated by the colophons add subtleties and dramatic ironies. Without the colophon, a poem may be an exquisite description of man remembering his wedding night and his bride’s shyness. With the colophon, it becomes a *marutam* poem, a poem of infidelity. The frame provides scope for looking at the experience in more than one way.

In his introduction to the English rendering of *Purānānūru*, George Hart, discussing the orality of the classic states that he does not believe that the poems are oral in the same way that the Homeric epics and the songs of the Yugoslav bards are – they are too complex to be extemporized. According to Lord, oral poetry should be crafted in such a way that each line ends a thought and that if more lines are added, they simply add to the thought that was essentially complete in the first line. But the Tamil heroic poems often do not conform to this requirement as we may find in certain poems a verb at the beginning of a poem and many lines later, an object or subject with an extraordinary complex structure intervening.

For example in *Puranānūru* 19, the verb “didn’t I embrace” comes in line 6, and the object, “your chest” is in line 18. Between the verb and its object comes the detailed description of the battlefield. This structure is so complex that it cannot be rendered into English. In translating the poem, we had to separate out the parts of the poem so that they made sense. It is difficult to imagine a singer extemporizing a poem as complex as this one (Hart xxxvi).

With regard to the other two elements of oral poetry—themes and formulas – Hart is of the view that *Puranānūru* has both, though it has fewer formulas than many oral texts such as the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, *Beowulf* and the *Mahābhārata*.

All this will go to show that the Caṅkam period cannot be completely identified with the heroic age and that the Caṅkam poet is not an illiterate reciter but a poet endowed with the powers of observation and meditation. This means that the Tamil heroic age would have preceded *Puram* poems.

It is interesting to note that in the very same year (1968) in which Kailasapathy’s book appeared, another book came out calling into question the indiscriminate application of the conclusions drawn from oral poetry by the Western Scholars. In his “La Litterature due Caṅkam et Son Public” included in *Purusartha* 7, 1983, François Gros is highly critical of the attempt on the part of Kailasapathy and some other scholars to show that Caṅkam writings have the characteristic features of the poetry of the Heroic Age like Homer’s epics. Gros contends that if Kailasapathy’s book was well received in England it might have been because it was dedicated to C.M. Bowra and heavily indebted to Milman Parry for its Greek comparisons. According to the learned French critic, Italo Ceciliono’s book, *Les chansons de gestes et l’épopée, Myths, Histories, Poems* (Torino 1968), condemns the vain attempt to reduce great literary writings to the level of formulas of oral poetry on the basis of the ordinary qualities gathered about the ancient oral songs. Praising this scholarly work, Gros concludes that because of it Kailasapathy’s idea had become outdated before his book was released.

One can cite numerous examples from *Puranānūru* to justify Ramanujan’s contention that in Caṅkam poems the formulaic elements are not static counters, not fixed in meaning, but quite sensitive to usage and

context. Aiyūr Muṭavanār's poem on Cōlan Kuḷamurrattut tuñciya kiḷḷivaḷavaṇ repeats the apostrophe "kalamceykōvē" thrice – twice in the first line and once in the fourth line – in a poem of fifteen lines.

O potter who fires pots! Potter who fires pots
in a kiln which shoots up a mass of blackened smoke
across the vast sky as if all darkness had been gathered
into the broad and ancient city, potter who fires pots!
You are to be pitied! How can you do what you must do?
He who had elephants with swaying tusks, he who was born
in the line of Cempiyaṇ, whose massive army poured
over the earth, whose majesty was far famed, whose
fine, undying glory has been praised by the poets
and has spread far across the sky as if it were the sun
with its expanding rays, the great vaḷavaṇ has reached
the world of the gods and now you want to fashion an urn
large enough to enclose him! With great Mount Mēru
for your clay and the wide earth for your wheel,
will you be able somehow to throw that vessel?

(*Purānānūru* 228)

The speaker wants to know if the potter will be able to make a pot large enough to hold the body of the king whose everlasting fame has spread far and wide and if he can manage to have Mount Meru for his clay and the wide earth for his wheel for such a purpose.

The *turai* called *Ānantappaiyuḷ* sings the misery of a woman who has lost her husband. The old commentator says that what the relatives express in sympathy with a dead person would also fall within the same *turai* and that the repetition in the poem is indicative of pity.

Another poem by an anonymous poet also makes use of the same repetition in a different context.

O potter who makes pots! Potter who makes pots!
Like a small white lizard caught on the spoke of a turning
wagon wheel
I've come with him across wasteland after wasteland. Take pity
Upon me as well ! And on the wide earth spreading out
in far-ranging expanses, fashion him a burial urn, one
that will be large, potter who makes pots
in the ancient town spreading out in great expanses.

Though in this piece also the phrases “Kalamcey kōvē” and “Nanantalai mūtūrkkalam ceykōvē” are repeated verbatim, the translators (Hart & Heifetz) have unfortunately translated them in different ways – ‘potter who fires pots’ in one case and ‘potter who makes pots’ in another case. The epithet ‘Naṇantalaimūtūr’ is omitted in the former poem and rendered ‘in the ancient town spreading out in great expanses’ in the latter. These are gross mistakes on the part of the translators as the repetition by one of the two poets would have been deliberate and ‘naṇantalaimūtūr’ would have certainly had a topical reference. The old commentator’s observation that the repetition in the second poem is indicative of hurry is very significant. The lady that has lost her husband hurries up the potter to throw a pot that will accommodate her together with her husband. This is obviously not a case of formulaic use of “kalam cey kōvē, kalam cey kōvē, naṇantalaimūtūr kalam cey kōvē.”

“Enpōl peruvituppuruka” (Let someone tremble like me) is a full sentence used by three *Puṛam* poets successfully ringing the changes required. Nakkaṇṇaiyar’s poem is assumed to express her one-sided love for a cōla king.

Because of the young warrior who wears war anklets on his legs
and whose beard is the colour of collyrium, the bangles hang loose
on my arms and I am afraid of my mother. Yet if I should embrace
those shoulders of a warrior, I may be shamed before the assembly!
May this bewildered city tremble as much
as I do, forever, not able to choose, divided between two minds!

(*Puṛanānūru* 83)

She curses the people of the city for stopping her from embracing the strong shoulders of her warrior-hero by desiring that they tremble as much as she does.

The heroine of Vanparaṇar reprimands the god of death himself for having cruelly snatched away her husband.

If I start to scream, I fear that tigers may come for you!
If I hug you and try to lift you up, I cannot raise
your broad chest. May unjust Death, who brought you pain,
shiver till he is exhausted, just as I do. Take my hand

which is still dense with bangles and we
will go into the shadow of the mountain. Only walk a little while.

(*Puranānūru* 225)

The song of Neṭuṅkaḷattupparaṇar also uses the phrase giving it a slightly changed meaning.

You of lower caste! And drummers! And people skilled in song!
Come to the dark man wearing clothes that are pure white!
Fend off the sound of the great birds! And I with the whirling
melody of viḷari, will keep away the white foxes. May the king
shudder as I do, for he took the garland woven with jewels
which he was wearing and placed it on the head of that man
eager to die for no reason while
on his own head he set that man's garland, of a single strand.

(*Puranānūru* 291)

A woman that has lost her husband in a war feels proud of the fact that since he has sacrificed his life for the glory of the king, the latter will be as grief-stricken as she is.

All the three pieces are from *Puranānūru* though they are of different *tiṇais*. The first one's *tuṛai* is *paḷiccutal* of *kaikkīlai*, the second one's *mutupālai* of *potuviyal* and the third one's *vēttiyial* of *karantai*. It is again a failure on the part of the translator that he has not managed to retain the same English equivalent of "Eṇpōl peru vituppuṛuka" in all the three poems drawing the attention of the reader to the peculiar craftsmanship of the poets. But the extremely effective utterance is translated "May (this bewildered city) tremble as much as I do", "May (unjust Death who brought you pain) shiver (till he is exhausted) just as I do" and "May (the king) shudder as I do".

What is more noteworthy is that an *Akam* poem also uses the same utterance adding a new dimension to it. In a *Narriṇai* piece by one Kayamanār, the heroine's mother curses the hero's mother for having given birth to a heartless young man who has, by uttering lies, persuaded the former's daughter to run away with him. Terribly upset by the news of her daughter's elopement, she expresses her desire that the hero's mother should also feel as frustrated as she is. In none of these poems does the statement occur as a formula or as a metrical requirement. It becomes an integral part of each contributing its share to the richness

of the structure and texture of the poem and serves to express the fusion of emotions like love, pathos, helplessness and anger.

The Caṅkam poets are known for the uncommon similes and metaphors they have used in their poems whose unparalleled success largely depends on them. Some of these comparisons get repeated but with variations indicative of the genius of the individual poet. Philanthropy, for example, is compared in poem after poem with the rain but in no poem is the signature of the poet concerned missing.

More than one poem uses *ñelikōl* (*Tikkataikōl* – a stick of kindling) as a richly suggestive simile. It is admirably used by Avvaiyār in one of her poems on her patron Atiyamān.

If he has much food, some will be left for himself. He'll give more to those who come to him in need than to those whom duty binds him to feed.

He is a good companion who enjoys dining with ordinary people. This is Neṭumān Añci. Like a stick of kindling set into the eaves of a house, he can hold his place without displaying his strength but like the huge fire that surges from that stick, suddenly he can show himself with his full power!

(*Puranānūru* 228)

A stick of kindling when preserved in the eaves of a house doesn't show its potential but the fire kindled by it can cause havoc; Añci appears harmless during days of peace but reveals his tremendous strength at the time of war.

Uṟaiyūr Mutukūttanār employs the same simile to praise the husbandry and hospitality of the leader of a small town.

The strong man of the village where men live by plowing with their bows and the wells are hacked out of stone to hold heavily brackish water will be able – even when he is impoverished – to come up with what he knows he doesn't have – as if he were an ignorant cowherd in extreme cold kindling a small fire in the faded evening. When he has something, though very little, he does not worry about there being many who come to him in need, but like a woman who is the light of her house, who deals out food, in due order, within a long, high pavilion, he can give away a bit here, a bit there according to worth.

But when times go well for him, as with the white rice of sacrifice
poured out in front of their doors by kings
who protect the world, he can, when he is needed, shower down his gifts!

(*Purānānūru* 228)

A cowherd, in the possession of a stick of kindling, can produce fire
in the snowy evening if required; the philanthropic leader can come up
with what he doesn't have when there is a demand on his generosity.

In the song of Ālattūr Kīlār, the fire kindled by a shepherd makes its
appearance but not as a simile.

In that village with handsome families, where there is wasteland,
where the dung of white sheep that have eaten kumīl fruit
is spread out like nuts, under a pavilion with strong pillars
by the light of a little fire kindled by a cowherd, the modest
man of great worth who sits down with bards is a friend
who knows his friend's heart and will give
his life if harm threatens that king whose armies win victories.

(*Purānānūru* 228)

The self-possessed hero whose praise is sung by Ālattūr Kīlār is seen
in the company of bards by the light of a little fire kindled by a shepherd.
A similar scene is depicted by Kaṭiyālūr Urutturaṅkaṇṇanār in
Perumpāṇārruppaṭai:

Sometimes he plays the sweet Pālai tune
On a pipe whose blackened stops are
Holed by red-hot brands that send forth smoke,
Enkindled by the fire produced by sticks
Together rubbed (*Perumpāṇārruppaṭai* 177-80).

Here a cowherd makes holes in his flute by using the fire from the
stick of kindling.

The Caṅkam bards, never suffering from the Bloomian anxiety of
influence, did not hesitate to employ the words, phrases, similes and even
complete sentences already used by their poetic ancestors. They were
confident that they could leave their own stamp upon them. But the
formulaic expressions used by Homer serve an altogether different purpose
as required by oral poetry. Phrases such as "windy Troy" and "weeping
Helen" get repeated and on certain occasions the 'weeping Helen' may not

weep or may even smile! It may not, therefore, be right to claim even on the basis of the presence of certain repeated epithets and phrases that *Puranānūru* is heroic poetry.

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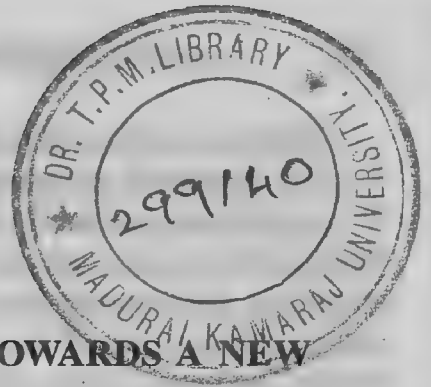
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5. THE POETRY OF PARANAR: TOWARDS A NEW HISTORICIST STUDY

New historicism has brought the two disciplines, literature and history, closer to each other than ever before. It is a critical method that situates a work of art in its historical context and at the same time breaks down the boundaries between artistic production and other kinds of social production – that is, between art and other historical traces, including just about anything from a royal utterance to a tract on hermaphrodites or a pamphlet on exorcism.¹

New Historicism is interested in the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical period. All the textual traces of the past are read with the attention traditionally conferred only on literary texts. As there is no privileging of the literary in a new historicist study, literary and non-literary texts are given equal weight and constantly inform each other. It is, therefore, viewed as “a combined interest in the textuality of history and the historicity of texts”, entailing intensive close reading of non-literary texts.

The great American critic, Greenblatt, is considered the founding father of New Historicism and because of his pioneering efforts it spread from history to film studies. If in 1981, Paul de Man, Jaques Derrida, and deconstruction dominated the world of literary theory, by 1985 the politics of deconstruction had to yield place to New Historicism. Explaining his critical practice, Greenblatt writes:

There's a defect I have made into a virtue; it's extremely hard for me to keep background things in the background. Not just texts, but lives and incidents, things that seem like they are going to be ornamental, gargoyles or filigree, turn out to be, if not main pillars, at least flying buttresses that keep the building from falling apart.²

There are some vital differences between old and new historicisms. The old approach was merely interested in making use of historical data. To the old historicists like E.M.W. Tillyard, the author of *The Elizabethan World Picture*, the literary text was of primary importance while the historical background was merely the setting and as such was of lesser worth. But the New Historicists give equal importance to literary and non-literary texts and study them as parallel texts. New Historicism is of the view that since historical events are irrevocably lost, what deserves our attention is history as represented and recorded in written documents, that is, history as text. The historical events and attitudes now exist as writing and this writing may be fruitfully subjected to the same type of close analysis as literary texts. New Historicism accepts Derrida's opinion that there is nothing outside the text and that everything about the past is available to us only in the form of texts. The French philosopher Foucault was another great influence on the New Historicists who are indebted to him for his notions about the power of the repressive state which is all-powerful and all-seeing and maintains its surveillance by the power of its discursive practices.

In the writings of Greenblatt and Louis Montrose we come across striking examples of New Historicism in practice. Whereas earlier Shakespeare criticism mystified Shakespeare, New Historicism juxtaposes his plays with other written texts such as penal, medical and colonial documents. A new historicist study of Jacobean theatre links the Jacobean plays closely with the political events of that period. A very illuminating and exciting lecture by Greenblatt undertakes a parallel study of Columbus's *Diario*, the great explorer's record of the events of his first voyage and a sixth century account of St Brendan's voyage to a mythical island and reveals the complex impulse behind 'the Christian imperialism' of the age of discovery.

This brief analysis of the name and nature of New historicism will enable us to realize the urgency to use the critical practice to advantage in the Indian context. We have an amazingly rich cultural past and at least ten ancient literatures which, together, cry for new historicist studies. For example, it was recently revealed that there is an unmistakable link between the stone inscriptions of an old temple in Ānamalai near Poḷḷachi and a poem in the Caṅkam classic *Kuruntokai*.³ From the temple history it is learnt that it was built in memory of a young maid who was sentenced to death by the chieftain, Nannan, because she ate a fruit from a forbidden

mango tree as it came floating down the river in which she was bathing. The story is used as an exquisite simile of the Miltonic type by Paraṇar in a poem where a girl's mother is asked not to be as cruel-hearted as Nannan who refused to listen to the pleas of the innocent maid's father even though the latter was prepared to offer the chieftain a gold statue of her weight and eighty one male elephants. The short poem uses all the gruesome details to make the heart-rending plea effective:

Mother!

Would you go to the depths of hell
like the woman-killing Nannan,
who rejected the offer
of eighty one elephants
besides a gold icon of her weight
and sentenced to death
the bright-browed lady
that, while bathing, ate the green mango
that came floating? –
she hasn't slept, in this inimical town,
since the day the smiling guest came.⁴

In a poem of eight lines in Tamil, the story of the sin of Nannan is described in five lines and in the remaining part the mother is requested to be considerate to the girl who has been spending sleepless nights in a hostile place where it has become difficult to meet her lover. By a chance discovery of the stone inscriptions in the Māsāni Amman temple in Ānamalai, more details about this tragic event have come to light. From the temple literature we learn that it was built in memory of an innocent girl put to death by Nannan, the chieftain of Ānamalai, one of the divisions of the ancient Kongunatu. Ānamalai was also known as Nannanur (Nannan's place) and Umparkātu. The stone inscriptions state that Nannan raised a mango tree on the bed of Aliyār and proclaimed that none should cut the branches or fruits of the tree. A young girl, who went to take bath in the river, ate it and was sentenced to death by Nannan. The girl's father was ready to give Nannan a statue made of gold equivalent to the weight of the girl and eighty-one male elephants as a compensation for his daughter's violation of the ruler's order. But Nannan turning a deaf ear to the importunities of the father killed her. A statue of the girl was later installed at the cremation ground and people began to worship it. The girl was adored as a goddess throughout the Kongu region. As the statue was prostrate it was called Māsāni, i.e. Mayāṇa Sayāni.

The story is immortalized in local folklore also. It is surprising to learn that even now devotees throng the temple on Tuesdays and Fridays. The three versions of the story as recorded in the local folklore, in the stone inscription and in the poem by one of the greatest Caṅkam poets perfectly agree with regard to most of the details. We don't know in what chronological order the three versions came into being. But since many of the poems included in the Caṅkam anthologies are about 2000 years old, Tamil scholars feel that the incident might have taken place in 500 B.C.

Now the reader's curiosity may naturally be aroused to find out more about the historical character called Nannan and to look for other references to him in Caṅkam poems. Unfortunately, the Tamil history doesn't come to our help and the Caṅkam Corpus refers to more than one Nannan causing a lot of confusion. From the little information that we can glean, it appears that Nannan, notorious for the murder of a girl, was the ruler of Pāli, Param and Pirampu hills and his might struck terror into the hearts of his enemies.

That Nannan was associated with the scandalous murder is evident from another short poem in *Puraṇānūru*, which is in the form of Peruntalaiccāttan's reply to the prince, Iḷaviccikkō who asks him why the poet chose to ignore him when he was in the company of another prince called Iḷam Kaṇṭirakkō. He says,

I didn't greet you because you are Nannan's
descendant and your doors are closed to the poets
whereas his ancestors are known for their
munificence.

(*Puraṇānūru* 151)

One more cruel deed of Nannan is mentioned by Paraṇar himself in a poem included in *Narriṇai*. This is in the form of an address by the friend of a girl to the latter's unfaithful husband who had strayed away but has now come back and prays for acceptance. He is chided for his misconduct in terms he can never forget:

Chieftain, you come to us like the beetle,
which, tired of the long-leafed tālai,
gets inebriated by the honey from
the flowers that adorn the tresses
dark as the night.

You seem to care more for my plea
than for the heart
of this well-decked
supple-shouldered lady
that knows not the art of
keeping her man tied to her;
Your conduct is more callous
than the deed of Nannan,
who wields a javelin
that drove away his enemies,
who rode fleet-footed
horses with handsome manes,
who had a rope made
of the tresses of the widows
of the kings killed by him.
I will, of course, forget your deeds.

(*Narriṇai* 270)

Half in jest and half in earnest, she tells him that he has behaved like the merciless Nannan who, after a wild slaughter of his enemies, got a thick rope made out of the tresses removed from the heads of their widows. When one comes across more and more of references to Nannan in Paraṇar's poems, one wonders if it is a tribute to or condemnation of Nannan's brute force. The story goes that a powerful clan called the Veḷirs seeking safety kept their properties under Nannan's custody in his place Pāli. Paraṇar capitalizes on this piece of information in a poem in *Akanānūru*. A frustrated lover finding it difficult to meet his lady love tells his heart:

You don't agree with me, my heart,
when I say she is not for us
though you know she is
more inaccessible than all the gold
kept by the Vēḷirs in Pāli
the closely guarded city of Nannan.

(*Akanānūru* 258)

Māmūlaṇār, another poet of the Caṅkam period also makes use of it equally effectively. A woman, whose daughter has eloped with her lover, laments pathetically telling people that the young girl had managed to run away spurning the security as tight as that which Nannan has provided his Pāli. (*Akanānūru* 15)

Now the reader's attention turns to Paraṇar to find out what kind of poet he is. Stephen Greenblatt's *Shakespearean Negotiations* begins with the sentence "I began with the desire to speak with the dead". Paraṇar, perhaps belonging to the community of singers called Pāṇar and often mentioned along with the other great Caṅkam poet Kapilar, has to his credit, 12 poems in *Puranānūru*, 34 in *Akanānūru*, 16 in *Kuruntokai*, 12 in *Narriṇai* and the fifth section of ten songs about Cēraṇ Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ in *Patirruppattu*. His poems are strikingly different from those of his contemporaries in that they are full of references to contemporary events and historical occurrences. He has written about some great Cēra and Cōḷa kings and the great philanthropist Pēkaṇ and is reported to have made concerted efforts to bring together Pēkaṇ and his wife who had fallen apart. Unlike many Caṅkam poets, he seems to be one who didn't have to depend too much on patrons, kings or chieftain friends:

We don't come to you because of hunger; we have no
burden of kith and kin to be supported; when we
beg of you to be compassionate and to do good, we
don't have the selfish intention of benefiting
from it.

(*Puranānūru* 145)

He is extremely pained by the destruction caused by war and gives expression to his agony in more than one poem in *Puranānūru* which normally celebrated victories on the battlefield. When a Cēra and a Cōḷa king fighting against each other perish with their armies, he, witnessing the scene of bloodshed, indulges in a serene contemplation on the colossal waste of human lives (*Puram* 63). It is the fate of the enemy's land that looms large in his mind even when he marvels at the might of Iḷamcēṭcenni:

Swords, victorious, stained with blood,
are as beauteous as the red sky;
As warring feet move fast on the field
anklets, disfigured, resemble deadly oxen's horns;
Shields, pierced by whizzing arrows,
look like sparring targets;
Their mouths, reddening with blood,
horses harnessed move like tigers
that have drunk the blood of their prey;
With tusks defaced while dashing
against fortress-doors

Elephants prowl like the lord of death;
Seated in a horse-drawn, golden chariot
 you shine like the red sun
 rising from the big sea.
Unrivalled as you are,
 your rival's land will grieve
 and cry ceaselessly
 like the unfed orphaned child.

(*Puranānūru* 4)

Makatpārkañci, a *turai* (situation) in which the hero who seeks the hand of one's daughter is sternly rejected, has a fascination for Paraṇar. In all the six poems of this type (*Puranānūru*, 336, 341, 343, 348, 352, 354) the poet does not gloat over the rejection using the occasion to berate the enemy king or mock his audacity. Nor is the focus on the invincibility of the girl's father or on her beauty. The poet, in all of them, is concerned with the serious consequences, the havoc that may be wrought with the girl's land being uppermost in his mind. The mother is ironically chastised for having reared a beautiful daughter:

The bride-seeking king is wild because of frustration. The father has failed to discharge his duty The mother who had been responsible for the growth of a beautiful girl, thereby causing the growth of enmity all around, knows no charity or culture.

(*Puranānūru* 336)

In another piece, even a ladder is said to bemoan the inevitable destruction of a city.

The city is under siege because the father of the girl has refused to give her in marriage even to those who are prepared to humbly present riches that equal the prosperous city of Muciṛi as they are not men of integrity. They are attempting to climb up the fortress to get into the city but the ladder slides. Is it because of its grief over the impending danger to the city and the two armies?

(*Puranānūru* 343)

The poet expresses his intense sorrow and utter disillusionment when he asks helplessly,

Is this fertile place going to lose all its charm just because this girl has the exquisite look of a female deer?

(*Puranānūru* 354)

From all these poems emerges the distinct personality of a poet who is interested more in historical events and personages than in myths and extremely concerned with the lot of mankind.

Positing resonance and wonder as the twin objectives, Greenblatt states that "it is the function of New Historicism continually to renew the marvellous at the heart of the resonant".⁵ By resonance, he means "the power of the object displayed to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which as metaphor or more simply as synecdoche it may be taken by a viewer to stand."⁶ And by wonder he means "the power of the object displayed to stop the viewer in his tracks to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention."⁷

When one moves from Paraṇar's poems to legend, folklore and history and from one poem to another and from them to the circumstances in which they were composed, one realizes the unique value of New Historicism in understanding and appreciating them.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Adam Begley, "The New Historicism" in *Dialogue*, 60. This essay, written in 1993, was reprinted from *The New York Times Magazine*.
- ² *Ibid.*, 62.
- ³ This is reported in *The Hindu* dated 20 October 1996. In a brief note entitled "Temple's Link to Caṅkam Literature" the staff reporter claims, "In a significant contribution to the understanding of ancient Tamil History, a clear link has been established between an old temple in Anamalai, near Pollachi, and an incident recounted in the Caṅkam literature of 2000 years ago, by the Inspector General of Police, Mr I.Ravi Arumugham."
- ⁴ Kuṟuntokai 292. Translation of all the Caṅkam poems quoted in the essay is mine.
- ⁵ Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder". In Peter Collier & Helga Geyer-Ryan, eds., *Literary Theory Today*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990, 89.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

6. THE FIRST POEM OF *KURUNTOKAI*: A DERRIDEAN DELIGHT

The poem by Tipputtōlār in *Kuruntokai* is known for its profound sense and sparing diction.

Ceṅkaḷam paṭakkonru avuṇart tēytta
Ceṅkōl ampiṇ ceṅkōṭṭu yāṇaik
Kaḷaltoṭic cēey kuṇṇam
Kurutip pūviṇ kulaikkān taṭṭē

That this short piece has more than one meaning is evident from the comments by Iḷampūraṇar, Pērācīriyar, and Naccinārkkīniyar, from U.Vē. Cāminataiyar's explication of it and from A.K. Ramanujan's translation of it into English. Taking this as a statement by the heroine's confidante, U.Vē. Cā. explains that when the hero desiring a meeting with the heroine makes a gift of red Kāntaḷ flowers, she refuses them saying that their hill also has them in abundance. Iḷampūraṇar, appreciating the poem's perfect use of sound patterns that constitute an ācīriyappā, draws our attention to the surprising fact that it consists of diverse types of lines(aṭi) as it manages to have eleven letters in the first line, nine in the second, eight in the third and ten in the fourth.

Rendering the poem in modern English, A.K. Ramanujan observes that it uses frame within frame thrice over.

What Her Girl Friend Said
to him, refusing his gift of red flowers
Red is the battlefield
as he crushes
the demons,
red his arrow shafts,
red the tusks
of his elephants:

this is the hill
of the Red one

with the whirling anklets,
the hill of red glory lilies,
flowers of blood.

On the face of it, according to A.K. Ramanujan, “the description could be from a war poem, in praise of a chieftain.” To praise Cēyōṇ or Murukaṇ, a god of war, the war imagery (red battlefield, demons, red arrow shafts, red tusks, flowers of blood)) is explicitly employed. At another level, it may be viewed as a religious poem, a prayer to Murukaṇ, as it praises his bounteous hill and his prowess on the battlefield. It is the title of the poem, “What her girl friend said to him, refusing his gift of flowers” that adds a third frame, which permits the traditionally acceptable explanation given by U. Vē. Cā. The girl friend is describing the plenty of red flowers on the Red One’s hill, not to praise the god but to reject the suitor’s gift, which is a love - token. If the flowers are accepted by them, that would be tantamount to complying with his request for a meeting. It is, therefore, obvious that the girl friend is delaying love’s consummation. To Ramanujan, “a war poem is set inside a religious one, which in turn is used to make a love poem. Three major genres are here, frame within frame” (279). His inference about the use of religious allusions in love poems and war poems is significant:

In early classical poetry, such religious allusions in the love poems invariably have an erotic agenda; they are part of the love game. In some war poems, a hero is compared to a god who is explicitly praised; the god’s praise becomes part of a tribute to the hero. In postclassical poetry, the converse pattern prevails; love and war motifs serve the ends of religious poetry. The motifs, the signifiers, come from the same stock; they do not change in form, but in significance. The frames change the poems (279).

The paradoxical use of *Puram* objects in this *Akam* poem makes it strikingly different from most other love poems. Murukaṇ possessing blood-stained arrows and an elephant with blood-stained tusks destroys the demons in a fight because of which the battlefield becomes red with blood. The poem includes only one object of *Akam* poetry, the Kāntaḷ flower but that too has the colour of blood. Though Murukaṇ is commonly praised as the god of war and love, here the dominant images are not associated with his youth and beauty but with his heroism and his ferocity.

In classical Tamil poetry, *Akam* and *Puram* are much more than thematic divisions and widely pervasive in Tamil poetry and culture. A.K.

Ramanujan has shown how the two categories are related to each other by context and by contrast:

| Akam | Puram |
|---|---|
| 1 interior | exterior |
| 2 heart, mind | body surfaces and extremities e.g., back, side, arms |
| 3 self | others |
| 4 kin | non-kin |
| 5 house, family | houseyard, field |
| 6 inland, settlement | area far from dense human habitation, e.g. jungle, desert |
| 7 earth | farthest ocean |
| 8 love poems- no names of places or persons | poetry about war and other than (well-matched?) love, a "public" poetry, with names of real people and places |
| 9 codes of conduct appropriate to <i>akam</i> | codes of conduct appropriate to <i>puram</i> |

(Ramanujan 262)

As Ramanujan has pointed out, *akam*/ *puram* contrasts such as inner/ outer, self/other, nature/culture, household/wilderness become part of the form and the content of the poem. While the love between well-matched lovers comes under *akam*, the life and death of heroes, their relations to lands, clan, enemy and bard are called *puram*. If women are central to the former, men as heroes are central to the latter. But this is not all. Though *Akam* and *Puram* seem to be diametrically opposed to each other, they are interdependent like the two sides of a coin. Tolkāppiyam states that for the seven *akattiṇai* like *kuriñci*, *Mullai*, *Marutam*, *Neytal*, *Pālai*, *Peruntiṇai* and, *Kaikkilai*, the seven corresponding *Purattiṇai* are *Veṭchi*, *Vañci*, *uḷiṇai*, *tumpai*, *vākai*, *kāñci* and *Pātāṇ*. *Veṭci* is capturing the cows of the enemy king by stealth; *karantai*, another form of *veṭci*, is recovering the cows captured. *Vañci* consists in the acts of valour with which a king and his army are attacked by another leading his own army. *Uḷiṇai* is besieging the fort of the enemy; *nocci*, another form of *uḷiṇai*, is saving the fort from the besieging army. *Tumpai* is the fierce fight between two warriors, or

armies. Vākai is the exaltation of the attainments of individuals in their vocations.

The learned commentators of *Tolkāppiyam* have pointed out how the two sets of *Akattiṇai* and *Purattiṇai* correspond to each other with regard to *mutal* (time and place), *karu* (native elements), and *uri* (appropriate human feelings and experience). The common features of *Kuṟiñci* and *Veṭci* are night, hillside and clandestine affair; and those of *mullai* and *Vañci* are forest, rainy season and separation from loved ones. *Marutam* corresponds to *Uḷiñci* with reference to fertile areas, dawn and refusing entry; *neytal* corresponds to *tumpai* with reference to seashore, open battle ground, evening and grief. *Pālai* and *Vākai* have no particular landscape and praise is their common theme. *Peruntṇai* and *Kāñci* have no fixed landscape and struggle is their common theme. *Kaikkilai* and *pāṭaṇ* have no particular landscape and their common burden is one-sided relationship.

Though there are other poems which exploit these binary opposites and their subterranean correspondences, in *Tipputtōḷār*'s poem, the application is stretched to the limit and our poetic experience extends well beyond the normal range. Besides being read as an invocation, as a war poem and as a love poem crossing the *Akam* and *Puraṁ* boundaries and sharing the features of three major genres, even as an *akam* poem having love as its theme it may be read in two contradicting ways. It is to the great credit of the commentator *Pērācīriyar* that he could not only perceive this but approve of both the meanings though they are opposed to each other. The poem simply says:

The hill of the Red one who wiped out the demons making the battle field red with blood and who wears whirling anklets and rides an elephant, its tusks red as the red arrows, has plenty of *kāntaḷ* flowers, red as blood.

If this is taken as the confidante's statement, the silent listener may be the hero or the heroine. *Muṇṇam* makes it clear that the addressor is the confidante but the identity of the addressee is left to the discretion of the reader. *U.Vē. Cā.*, contending that by *muṇṇam* the addressee has to be taken as the hero, includes in his interpretation the apostrophe, *Verpa*" (*the one that owns the hill*). But *Pērācīriyar* and *Naccinārkkīṇiyar*, accepting the possibilities of the addressee being the hero or the heroine, mention the grammatical justifications also.

Pērācīriyar's explication is as follows:

If the statement is made to the hero, what is implied is that they do not lack these flowers. It is *kūrreccam* and that doesn't do any damage to the poem. If the statement is made to the heroine, what is implied is that if she wants to see them for herself she can go there. Hinting at this, the confidante may leave the spot so that the meeting of the hero and the heroine may take place. Since she may not explicitly ask her to go and meet the hero, she may adopt this strategy. In that case, it is *kurippeccam*.

Following in the footsteps of the senior commentator, as is his wont, Naccinārkkiniyar also gives the same explanations.

While U.Vē.Cā accepts the first explanation, *Iraiyanār Akapporuḷ* and *Tamiḷ Neri Viḷakkam* present the second one with approval. *Iraiyanār Akapporuḷ* states that this poem is an example of the situation in which the confidante leaves the heroine at the rendezvous and as such means that knowing the arrival of the hero, the girl friend takes the heroine to the appointed place and goes away under the pretext that she would herself bring the *kāntaḷ* flowers as the heroine shouldn't near the place haunted by a goddess. *Tamiḷ Neri Viḷakkam* endorses this interpretation.

R. Raghava Iyengar observes that the poem gives room for assigning more than one reason to the girl friend's refusal of the gift of red flowers. She may imply that the heroine won't accept the red flowers because there are plenty of them in her own hill or because they belong to the goddess of the hill or to the woman possessed by the goddess or because the heroine would be upset if she sees that the flowers have been burnt by the heat of the hero's body. Ultimately, the question whether the heroine reciprocates the hero's love or not has to be settled by one or the other of these explanations.

An extra dimension is added to the poem when we choose a psychological approach. Of the objects mentioned in the poem, the blood-drenched battlefield, the red arrows, the red tusks and Cēyōṇ as a warrior are of *Purattiṇai* while Cēyōṇ as a god of love, his hill and *kāntaḷ* are of *Akattiṇai*. When viewed as psychological symbols, the red arrows and the red tusks stand for man and the twigs of red flowers for woman. This would mean that the heroine was in love with the hero and in favour of intercourse. The girl friend, therefore, indirectly conveys the heroine's desire for the union. Even when the poem is taken to mean that she refuses to accept *kāntaḷ*, it need not imply that he has been totally rejected but that

she wants to delay the meeting just to assess the depth of his love and affection for her. The objects that she mentions may hint at the fact that the heroine is really interested in finally accepting him. It may be because of this reason that she is projecting the sexual images in her statement. Though the words mean refusal, the images imply acceptance.

If there is neither *kūrreccam* nor *kurippeccam* and the girl friend's utterance is complete in itself, the poem would simply mean that the hill of Cēyōṇ has a large quantity of red flowers. In that case, the confidante uses sexual symbols in order to intensify the desire of the hero and to reveal indirectly the heroine's readiness for the clandestine meeting. That the *kāntaḷ* flower may be used to symbolically indicate the heroine's passionate desire is evident from certain other *akam* poems also.

O my friend!

The millet crops which we guarded

Against the plundering birds

Are fully ripe and are ready for harvest,

The dry blades rustle and sound

Like a falling cascade;

It seems we will leave for our home,

Causing the fragrant grove to look desolate;

The grove, rich in *Kūtaḷam* plants,

Is in the comely hill- range

Where *kāntaḷ* flowers in clusters

Exude their sweet fragrance.

How shall we get over the hazards

Of the path and get to our lover, the deserter,

Our heart is full of desire to behold him

And our dense, charming hair glowing

Like unto the workmanship of a goldsmith,

Glow with flowers, fresh of the dark-trunked *vēṅkai* blooms?

(*Narriṇai* 313)

When the hero is beside the hedge, with a view to informing him of the problem to be faced by the heroine, the confidante tells her that since the millet crops are ready for harvest, they would be asked to leave the field soon and that once the heroine is back at home, he won't be able to meet her. Since the forest paths are hazardous, her crossing them to meet him is ruled out. But this doesn't mean that he has to stop meeting her. It is but proper on his part to get the consent of her parents for the wedding.

The reference to the fragrant *kāntaḷ* clusters will clearly convey to the hero the message of the heroine's eagerness to get married to him.

Another *kuriñci* poem in *Narriṇai* also uses the *kāntaḷ* symbol in the same way.

Our lover is the chief of a hill
Where a calf fails to recognize its mother,
A cow, red of hue and short horned,
As it had got its colour altered
After it had rubbed its body
Against the swaying clusters of *kāntaḷ* blooms,
While grazing in the hill,
Offered us the woven leaves
Which we are reluctant to accept and wear
For fear of our mother!
Should we refuse
We would be pained by our lover's distress.
Would not our dilemma cause
The leaves to fade away –
These leaves which he fetched here
Were secured by him painstakingly,
From the hillside,
Haunted by deities and so,
Even the war-like hill-goats
Would not frolick in it?

(*Narriṇai* 359)

The *koḷu* of this poem states that the heroine after accepting the gift from the hero acts in accordance with the desire of the heroine. They are prepared to accept the leaves because they have been secured painstakingly by the hero who may be upset if they are refused. But the heroine's willingness to accept his hand in marriage is indirectly conveyed by the *kāntaḷ* image. In his land, the calf is perplexed and fails to identify its own mother when the latter is smeared with the pollen of *kāntaḷ* flowers while grazing.

In an *Akanānūru* piece by *Taṅkāṛ poṛkollanār*, the *kāntaḷ* symbol is given prominence. The confidante asks the heroine, the hero being within earshot, why he has been delaying the wedding.

Bless you, my dear lady! He is the lord of a cloud-capped hilly place, where the beetles piercing the fragrant pollen of the *kāntaḷ* blossoms

which growing near the kāyā trees appear like the spread hood of the cobra scared of the peacock look like the dice played with the hand. When the hailstones hitting the tusker's face with spots like sprinkled pearls beautify the rocks by pouring on them, when it rains with lightning and thunder as though the clouds were in anger, at dead of night, he comes crossing a path where animals roam about in order to meet us but he hasn't conferred on us the bliss of lasting union. It behoves the intelligent to rid their people of their misery. Why is it he hasn't done that to us? (*Akanānūru* 355).

The kāntaḷ flowers which by their beauty delight every one are compared to the cobra's hood that is scary because the girl friend wants the hero to realize that his visit is welcome to the heroine though she is frightened of what may happen to him on the way.

Derrida contends that deconstruction is neither destruction nor reconstruction but that it means that a poem is shown to dismantle itself. The author might not have intended his poem to mean what a deconstructive critic reveals in it by reading it against the grain. The objective of deconstructive criticism is to show the poem in a perspective unknown to itself. It brings to light what is not explicit by examining the relationship between the linguistic elements which the author can and cannot have under his control. The author of the first poem of *kuruntokai* would have meant it only as an akam poem or as a puram poem, would have thought of only *kurippeccam* or *kūrreccam* if an akam poem but the learned commentators have demonstrated that it provides scope for multiple contradicting interpretations. Their stance is borne out by the present-day deconstructive criticism.

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7. ART VERSUS PORNOGRAPHY: A BEDROOM SCENE FROM ĀKANĀNŪRU

Now there is a widespread tendency to speak of Prākṛit *Gātāsaptasati*, Sanskrit love poetry and Tamil akam poems in the same breath. A poem in *Akanānūru* by Virrūru Mūteyananār has chosen a daring theme but attains remarkable success as a work of art. It has to be compared with similar poems in Sanskrit, Prākṛit and also in English if its uniqueness and the general nature of Tamil love poetry are to be understood. Such an exercise will, incidentally, cast light on the question of art versus pornography, which, once raised in the case of modern writings such as D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*, seems to have been sidelined in the post-modern period.

Pornography, one should remember, attempts to evoke a reader's sexual fantasies to the exclusion of other human concerns, depicts a sexual utopia, in which experience is untouched by the conflicts or failures of human striving. Thus, the biological urges of its characters are immediately and completely satisfied without emotional, spiritual or moral consequences. ... Literary art, on the other hand, presents a complex vision of reality, of which the sexual experience may be an integral part; however, such a vision is accompanied by an imaginative grasp of the contradictions, ironies, and failings of life by bringing them into relation with man's moral, spiritual, and emotional, as well as physical existence. The effect is to deepen and enlarge the reader's perception of the complexities of human experience. In literary art, then, the imagination functions to reveal the essential truths of the human condition, whereas in pornography, fantasy functions primarily to arouse and perhaps satisfy, if only vicariously, man's sexual appetites (Beckson 194).

Any impartial reader of ancient Indian poetry knows that Tamil Akam poetry passes this test and eminently qualifies for literary art as described here whereas the erotic verses in Prākṛit and Sanskrit fall far short of the requirements of art.

Donne's 'To His Mistress Going to Bed, entitled "an elegy", is a poem about love in heroic couplets. Composed in the Ovidian tradition, it celebrates the techniques of seduction from the point of view of a clever man and its style displays ingenuity and wit in elaborate conceits. The speaker is apparently a lover lying in bed urging his shy mistress to undress and get into bed.

Come, madam, come, all rest my powers defy,
 Until I labor, I in labor lie.
 The foe oft-times having the foe in sight,
 Is tired with standing though he never fight.
 Off with that girdle, like heaven's zone glistening
 But a far fairer world encompassing.
 Unpin that spangled breastplate which you wear,
 That the eyes of busy fools may be stopped there.
 Unlace yourself, for that harmonious chime
 Tells me from you that now 'tis your bed time.
 Off with that happy busk, which I envy,
 That still can be and still can stand so nigh.
 Your gown, going off, such beauteous state reveals,
 As when from flowery meads the hill's shadow steals.
 Off with that wiry coronet and show
 The hairy diadem which on you doth grow:
 Now off with those shoes, and then safely tread
 In this love's hallowed temple, this soft bed.
 In such white robes, heaven's angels used to be
 Received by men; thou, angel, bring'st with thee
 A heaven like Mahomet's Paradise; and though
 Ill spirits walk in white, we easily know
 By this these angels from an evil sprite:
 Those set our hairs, but these our flesh upright.

License my roving hands, and let them go
 Before, behind, between, above, below.
 O my America! My new-found-land,
 My kingdom, safest when with one man manned,
 My mine of precious stones, my empery,
 How blest am I in this discovering thee!
 To enter in these bonds is to be free;
 Then where my hand is set, my seal shall be.
 Full nakedness! All joys are due to thee,
 As souls unbodied, bodies unclothed must be
 To taste whole joys. Gems which you women use
 Are like Atlanta's balls, cast in men's views,

That when a fool's eye lighteth on a gem,
His earthly soul may covet theirs, not them.
Like pictures, or like books' gay coverings made
For lay-men, are all women thus arrayed;
Themselves are mystic books, which only we
(Whom their imputed grace will dignify)
Must see revealed. Then, since that I may know,
As liberally as to a midwife, show
Thyself: cast all, yea, this white linen hence,
Here is no penance, much less innocence.

To teach thee, I am naked first; why than,
What needst thou have more covering than a man.

The poem consists in an argument, the second part recording the wild workings of the lover's imagination as he visualizes the successive stages of his love-making. There is a characteristically explosive opening making use of the common Petrarchan convention, the comparison of love to warfare besides a liberal scattering of words which are sexual puns or carry sexual ambiguities:

"powers", "labour", "standing", "flight", "world", "stand", "tread", "received". "... The rest of the opening section (lines 5 – 24) offers little more than an exercise in the mannerisms of the genre. This passage is jaunty and conventionally indelicate, but it has very little dramatic continuity and no central artistic structure. It presents merely a string of disconnected, flashy, and far-fetched conceits, enlivened by sexual innuendoes. Donne is straining to be novel and clever, but what he writes in these lines is simply a routine performance in the conventional manner of Ovidian erotic verse (Clay Hunt 188).

The basic metaphor of the next passage – a comparison of the physical beauties of the lady to the material wealth which the Indies possessed – happens to be one of the commonplaces of Elizabethan love poetry. The lover assumes the role of an explorer who is requesting a royal patent which will empower him to discover a new land, explore its wealth, conquer it and bring it under his control. But one is not sure if the exploration image supposed to dramatize the lover's passionate excitement and his sense of power in his sexual mastery of his mistress will succeed in drawing the attention of the reader or if the downright vulgarity of the passage – "Before, behind, between, above, below... Then where my hand is set, my seal shall be" – will make him wince. The fanciful argument developed later that since the Beatific Vision is like taking off your clothes to

experience full joy, then taking off your clothes to experience full joy is like the Beatific Vision may not be condemned on the ground that it is a pseudo-theological validation for nakedness and bust. But the shocking paradox is, to say the least, in bad taste. Both the Christian heaven and Mahomet's Paradise are casually damned.

Donne's language is said to take on a specifically theological reference in lines 42-3:

Themselves are mystic books, which only we
Whom their imputed grace will dignify.

According to Christian theology, the Beatific Vision is granted to the soul, and the soul is enabled to experience it, only through God's special 'imputation' of Grace to a being who is inherently neither worthy nor capable of the experience. But the poem again fails in artistically identifying sexual experience with religious mysticism. As Clay Hunt admits,

.... Donne's real subject is in the sheer physical pleasure of sexual intercourse He puns, first, on the sexual meaning of "know," then on "literally," which carries its Renaissance ambiguity of "lewdly" and on "show," which is an indecent Renaissance colloquialism for sexual exposure. These ambiguities give the lines a tonal quality which is far from delicate, but Donne's final thrust is reserved for the word "self" in line 45. In line 41 "selves" refers – on the poem's factual level – to a woman's naked body; but the ambiguity on "show" and the precise anatomical suggestions of the phrase "as liberally, as to a midwife" limit the reference of the word in line 45 and make clear that "self" in that line refers not to the woman's body as a whole but rather to her genitals (Hunt 197).

If a religious reader may simply be horrified by the passage, a modern secularized reader may realize that it does nothing less or more than identify a woman's genitals with the Essence of God. Hunt uses all the power of his mind and imagination to demonstrate that "the formal rhetoric of the elegy gives it qualities of weight and dignity which are lacking in most of the Renaissance erotic verse in the Ovidian tradition" and that the final section of the poem is much "more than a piece of outrageous intellectual impudence on Donne's part." But in the course of the analysis Hunt is often forced to concede that it is ultimately an artistic failure.

The Elegy shows Donne as a brilliant apprentice who is still short of technical mastery. It is uneven performance, ordinary in some passages

and dazzling in others. Though it shows more sense of form than most of Donne's elegies, the poem as a whole lacks the clear imaginative organization and precise formal definition of his mature work. ... It is verse of flash and glitter, the display of a young virtuoso who is showing what he can do with the themes of Ovidian poetry by playing them on his own instrument (Hunt 198-99).

The poem witnesses to the simple fact that even extreme intellectual ingenuity and 'metaphysical acrobatics' may not make a poem genuinely artistic and aesthetically gratifying.

Writing his religious and love lyrics in the seventeenth century, Donne had the advantage of being thoroughly acquainted with the Greek, Roman, French and English lyrical traditions. Though he became an accomplished artist and went on to write exemplary love poems like "The Ecstasy", he bungled whenever he was in a wanton mood. In addition to inheriting a great tradition and a sublime theory of poetry, the Caṅkam poets were well aware of their social responsibility and would never cross the limits of decorum and decency either knowingly or unknowingly.

Pretending to present an actual dramatic situation, Donne's poem portrays a lover who imagines what he will do once his mistress makes her presence in the room. The Akam poem by Viṛṭṭu Mūteyinaṇar also presents a scene from a bedroom but the consummate Tamil artist catches a male protagonist in a reminiscent mood recalling what took place between his bride and himself on the wedding night.

A.K. Ramanujan's English rendering is quoted here even though it is sexually more explicit than the Tamil original.

What He Said

after a quarrel, remembering his wedding night
Serving in endless bounty
white rice and meat
cooked to a turn,
drenched in ghee,
to honored guests,

and when the bird omens were right,
at the perfect junction
of the Wagon Stars with the moon

shining in a wide soft-lit sky,
wedding site decorated, gods honored,
kettledrum and marriage drum
sounding loud the wedding beat,

the women who'd given her a bridal bath
—piercing eyes looking on, unwinking —
suddenly gone,

her near kin
strung a white thread on her
with the split soft-backed leaves
of the sirissa,
and with the aruku grass,

its sacred root a figurine,
its buds cool, fragrant,
dark-petalled, blue
as washed sapphire,

brought forth by the thundering skies
of first rains in valleys
where adolescent calves
feed on them,

they brought her to me
decked in new clothes,
rousing my desire
even in the wedding canopy,
wedding noises noisy as
pounding rain,
on that first night,
and when they wiped her sweat,
and gave her to me,

she splendid with ornament,
I said to her
who was body now to my breath,
chaste without harshness,
wrapped all over in a robe
new, uncrushed,

"It's hot. Sweat is breaking out
on that crescent, your brow,
Open your robe a little,

let the wind cool it.”
and even as I spoke,
my heart hasty with desire,
I pulled it off

and she stood exposed,
her form shining
like a sword unsheathed,
not knowing how to hide herself,

cried Woy!
in shame, then bowed, begged of me,
as she loosened her hair
undoing the thick colourful wreath
of broken lily petals

and, with the darkness of black full tresses,
hand-picked flowers on them
still luring the bees,
hid
her private
parts.

Virru Mūteyinaṇār
Akanānūru 136

While explaining *Akam* and *Puṇam* as poetic devices, Ramanujan cites this and observes,

Many *marutam* poems are literally enacted at the door which is shut in the face of the unfaithful returning husband. The most extraordinary of these “door shutting” (*Vāyil marutta*) poems moves from *Puṇam* to *Akam*, from the public realm of townsmen, kinsmen and the wedding ceremony, step by step to the privacy of the bedroom and finally to the ultimate *akam* or interior of the bride’s private parts (266).

The old commentator *Naccinārkkīṇiyar* would mention it as an example of portrayal of wedded life to which clandestine love has led. From the first reading of the poem itself, one would understand that the husband is grief-stricken as he is shown the door by his wife who, at the first night as a shy and timid lady expressed her love for him with extreme coyness. It was a grand wedding during which a large quantity of white rice and meat

drenched in ghee was liberally served to noble guests. When the bird omens were favourable on a day when the moon joined the urōkini star, the gods were honoured and the wedding drums were sounded. The bride was given a bath by a few women who looked at her with piercing eyes and disappeared after leaving her near the bedchamber. Her close relatives strung a white thread on her with the soft-backed *Vākai* leaves and the *aruku* grass, decked her in new clothes and after wiping her sweat sent her to him. He told her, “Chaste without being harsh, you are now body to my breath. Since you are perspiring, why don’t you open your new, uncrushed robe a little and let the wind cool your crescent-like brow. So saying, his heart full of desire, he pulled off the robe. Shining like a sword unsheathed, not knowing how to hide herself, blushing in shame, she bowed and begged of him as she loosened her hair undoing the thick colourful wreath of broken lily petals and hid herself with the darkness of black full tresses.

It is a realistic description of the wedding which takes most of the space of the poem. A very short phrase in the form of an apostrophe “em uyir uṭampaṭuvi” (‘you have embodied my life’) effectively reveals the intensity of his love for her. Her beauty, her love for him, her coyness and simplicity are all dramatized in a brief scene describing her attempt to hide herself with her loosened hair. The poem ends where it should, leaving much to the imagination of the reader. None can escape the terrible impact of the dominant image of the poem – ‘her unrobed body gleaming like an unsheathed sword’. Unfortunately, Ramanujan’s translation makes the last scene glaringly sexual by changing the order of words in the original in order to give prominence to “her private parts”.

This single piece from *Akanānūru* is enough to demonstrate that in sophisticated artistry Prākṛit and Sanskrit versifiers were no match for most of the Caṅkam poets.

Translating a few poems each from the three Tamil anthologies *Narriṇai*, *Kuruntokai* and *Aiṅkuṇūru*, the Sanskrit *Amarusataka* and *Subhaṣitaratnaśa*, and the Prākṛit *Gāthāsaptasatī* and *Vajjālagga*, Martha Ann Selby, in her *Grow Long, Blessed Night*, sets out to examine issues of form, figure and mood in what is called classical Indian love poetry and claims that the purpose of her analyses is to arrive at a Pan-Indian sense of what a classical lyric poem is through an exploration of differences in these traditions. She is also interested in exploring ways in which the various “readings” of these texts through history might reflect interrelationships of

textuality, gender and sexuality. She casually rejects George Hart's well-documented thesis that "Tamil elements may have filtered northward through the membrane of Prākṛit gāthā" and declares as her finding what is known to every reader of Indian classical poetry:

There is definite evidence in the poems themselves that later Sanskrit poems were inspired by earlier poems in Prākṛit.

Ignoring all the evidence provided by George Hart in *The Poems of Ancient Tamil: Their Milieu and their Sanskrit Counterparts* and by Siegfried Lienhard in his "Tamil Literature Conventions and Sanskrit Mukṭaka Poetry" which shows how several standard Sanskrit *Kavisamayas* are of Tamil origin, she pontificates that "there is no clear intertextual evidence indicating that Tamil literature influenced the Prākṛit (or Sanskrit) compositions in any way whatsoever", but hastens to add that "I would suggest a possible relationship between early Prākṛit gāthās and the short aphoristic verses of the fourth-century Tamil anthology *Aiṅkurunūru*."

Martha Ann Selby would do well to read the first few pages of *Kalidāsa* by K. Krishnamoorthy, a professor of Sanskrit and a recognized authority on Indian poetics, whose well known publications include critical editions of *Dhvanyaloka*, *Vakroktijivita*, and *Nāṭyasastra* with *Abhinavabharati*. The following are some of the statements made by the Sanskrit scholar:

The messenger poem does not occur in Sanskrit before Kalidasa, but it is found in Tamil Caṅkam poems.

Another important theme that first appears in the *Satta-sai* which is traceable to Tamil is the *abhisārikā* or wanton woman who goes out to meet her lover at night.

Āryā and Skandhaka (or Khandaa), sometimes called Āryāgīti, are metres based on syllabic instants (mātrās) and they have their origin in Tamil metres. While *paumacariu* is in Āryā, all the later Prākṛit Kāvyaas like *Setubandha* are mostly in Āryāgīti metre. Kalidasa's naṭi in the *Abhijñanasākuntala* sings about summer in a Mahārāṣṭri verse and so does the heroine compose a Mahārāṣṭri verse in her love letter. This culture of the Deccan was influenced primarily by Tamil sources...

Mahārāṣṭra and Vidarbha bordering Tamilnadu must have acted as a bridge or carrier of Tamil poetic conventions directly into Mahārāṣṭri Prākṛit and through it into classical Sanskrit (12-13.).

In order to “prove” that some of the gāthās were reworked into Sanskrit, Martha Ann Selby quotes two poems, one from the *Gāthāsaptasati* and another from *Amarusataka* in both of which “certain boundaries are employed as a trope”.

Forget about the precious sight
Of my lover’s face
That steals away my heart
Just seeing the borders
Of the fields on the borders of her village
Gives me instant joy. (*Gāthāsaptasati* 2.68)

When my heart was obsessed with her
from love at first sight
and I thought of a way to win her
when my passion skyrocketed
and the need for a go-between
became greater and greater,
never mind the pleasure I’d get
from eagerly embracing that woman,
just roaming the streets near her house
evokes supreme delight. (*Amarusataka* 100)

Comparing the two pieces, she concludes that “the exigencies of *sradharā* meter are what make the Sanskrit poem a rather poor one in comparison to the gāthā” (Selby 8). Unfortunately, she doesn’t seem to be aware of the existence of an ancient Tamil piece, which uses a similar motif to achieve greater poetic and psychological effects.

Be good to her, O north wind,
and may you prosper!
There, among their silver rills
that look like hanging snake skins,
high on the hill
where herds of elk
plunder the gooseberry
in the courtyards,
there
lies my good woman’s village
of grass thatched cottages. (*Kuruntokai* 235 Tr. A.K. Ramanujan)

It may be mentioned in passing that in another book entitled *The circle of six seasons*, Martha Ann Selby, making a selection from Old Tamil, Prākṛit and Sanskrit poetry on the theme of the six seasons, wonders why instead of beginning where most poets like to begin, ie, in the spring, the *Ṛtusamhāra* and *Sākuntala* begin at the onset of summer and end with spring. She dwells at length on the link between the *Ṛtusamhāra* and early Sanskrit medical literature because of the remarkable similarities in their seasonal descriptions. It is noted by her that the medical texts group the six seasons in two sets of three, beginning with *śiśīra*, *vasanta* and *grīṣma* (late winter, spring and summer) and ending with *varṣā*, *śarad* and *hemanta* (the rainy season, autumn and early winter). Since the two works by Kalidasa begin in the dry, hot, asexual summer and end in springtime, Raghavan sees an intimate link between *Sakuntala* and *Ṛtusamhāra* and tries to unravel the mystery regarding the order in which the seasons are treated:

Of this festival of life, there is no beginning and no end. What does it matter where one begins? Kalidasa, no doubt, had his own fascination for summer (sic) [T] he last and greatest work of Kalidasa, like his first, begins with summer and ends with spring.

The questions relating to the source of *Ṛtusamhāra* and the order in which the seasons are described would not have been raised by the two scholars if only they had gone through the Tamil epic *Cilappatikāram* carefully. In the fourteenth canto of the epic, there is a splendid poetic account of life in Maturai during the six seasons (Ll. 70-119) beginning with summer and ending with spring ! There is more than enough evidence to suggest that Kalidasa was familiar with *Cilappatikāram*.

In both the works, Martha Ann Selby is primarily interested in juxtaposing love poems that have similar motifs and in examining them employing what she calls “the three most important critical notions from Indian classical poetics as described by traditional scholars: *tiṇai* for old Tamil, *rasa* for Sanskrit and *dhvani* for Prākṛit. This approach enables her to understand and explain the poems with the help of the old commentaries available but not to discriminate between what is poetry and what is not poetry, or to distinguish gold from dross or sift the grain from the chaff. Moreover, *tiṇai*, *rasa* and *dhvani* do not exclude one another. *Rasa* and *dhvani* are not substitutes for *tiṇai* and a Tamil poem can be examined from the standpoint of *tiṇai* or *rasa* or *dhvani*. And this is true of the poems in Sanskrit and Prākṛit also.

Seriously lacking a sound knowledge of the three poetic traditions, she heavily relies on secondary sources even to comprehend the poems she discusses. As a result of this handicap, she becomes indifferent to their poetic merits and lumps together the finest of love poems and the cheapest of erotic verses. That is the reason why poems from *Amarusataka* and *Gāthāsaptasati* are put on a par with poems from *Narriṇai*, *Kuruntokai* and *Aiṅkurunūru*. The short pieces of *Aiṅkurunūru* appear to be “aphoristic” to her. The economy of diction, the appeal through striking images and the psychological realism of the Caṅkam poems are all lost on her. An aphorism is a concise statement of a precept given in pointed words and the word is now generally used to mean “a short and clever or witty sentence, which expresses a general truth”. Didactic writings may resort to aphoristic utterances. But in the best of didactic works like *Tirukkural*, the author sees to it that an aphorism is converted into a poem.

The limitations of Selby’s approach become noticeable when she chooses to compare three poems sharing one object, a parrot, “an identifiable erotic rhetorical trigger” in all three literatures.

At daybreak,
when the parrot
was bent on mimicking
her cries of passion
in front of her elders
the doe-eyed girl,
embarrassed,
drowned it out
by jangling
her stacks of bangles,
clapping
as if to make
the children dance in play. (*Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa* 616)

May parrots outlive
the flood at the end of time!
They’ve caused this clatter
made by the long arms
of the woman
with the thick black hair
and many gleaming jewels. (*Aiṅkurunūru* 281)

Look,
rubies and emeralds mixed

fall from heaven
like a necklace unstrung
from the throat of the sky-goddess
A line of parrots. (*Gāthāsaptasati* 1.75)

Bringing these poems together because all the three use the parrot “as a symbol of one sort or another”, Selby interprets them in the light of the three different traditions and passes judgments on their poetic qualities. The Sanskrit verse is “an erotic sketch, an almost painterly object; a sexual vignette Nothing is left to the imagination and all possible elements are incorporated – time, the parrot and the function of the parrot, bedroom moans, judgmental in-laws, the girl, her eyes and her embarrassment, and the noise she makes as she tries to cover up her crime”. After explaining the setting of the Tamil poem, she writes that it is sparse unlike the Sanskrit verse and that its complexity lies in its semantics. “The parrot here is not simply a causal element but a paradigmatic one, as well; its presence in the verse alludes to certain erotic paradigms of which it is a part, moving the poem to a third dimension of resonance, fetching a memory of love and inciting a renewed longing.” She reserves the highest praise for the Prākṛit piece:

The Sanskrit verse asks us to admire it. It is a closed system.. The Tamil poem asks us to praise parrots, to share in a memory, *Ṛtusamhāra* create a collective longing. But the Prākṛit verse seduces us right along with the woman to whom it might have been addressed (Selby 20).

The critic fails to realize that the Prākṛit Gāthā is an artistic failure while the Sanskrit piece does not rise above the level of erotic verse. In order to defend the Gāthā, she brings in the concept of *dhvani* and the two interpretations of it by Mathurānāth Sastri and Gaṅgādharaḥṭṭa. Claiming that the poem is a statement by a certain man who was strolling in a garden to the woman walking next to him in order to incite love in her heart, Sastri writes,

you look at the line of parrots falling from heaven like a necklace (called *kaṇṭhi*); like a necklace composed of (strung with) emerald and ruby stones that has broken from the middle of the sky-goddess’ throat. Because of the green colour of the parrots, they look like emerald gems, and because of the red colour of their beaks, they are the same as rubies. Thus, this verse is a metaphor and moreover, it is indicated to the beloved woman that it is the time for savoring love.

To Gaṅgādharaḥṭṭa, “a certain woman who is intent on having sex said this to fix her lover’s mind on something else for the sake of making their pleasure last longer”.

The problem is that the poem simply describes a line of parrots as an unstrung necklace and leaves it there without offering any clues as to how the metaphor should be interpreted and who the speaker and the listener are. A reader can, therefore, think of a hundred different contexts and a hundred different interpretations. This is not the way *the dhvani* as conceived by Anandhavardhana or the *iraicci* as conceived by the ancient Tamils works. Both the interpretations resorting to the device of *dhvani* are naïve and force us to conclude that the poem fails miserably in suggesting what it wants to. If the author of the Sanskrit poem leaves nothing to the imagination of the reader, the Gāthā poet leaves everything to the imagination of the reader, thereby reducing the verse to a puzzle. When interpreted as an erotic text in the way the two commentators have done, the Prākṛit piece borders on vulgarity and like the Sanskrit verse, it also lacks the artistic subtlety and the profundity of thought that characterize the poem from *Aiṅkurunūru*.

And this is not all. In the case of erotic poems, a line has to be drawn between art and pornography. The love poems of the Caṅkṁ anthology, with a few possible exceptions from *Kalittokai*, never attempt obscene depictions of sexual act. Even the few *Kalittokai* poems which are explicitly sexual happen to be supreme artistic achievements. This cannot be said of the erotic verses in Sanskrit or Prākṛit. While discussing the poems from *Amarusataka*, Selby is interested in finding out if the dominant *rasa* is *vipralambha sṛṅgārā* or *sambhoga sṛṅgārā*. She ignores to ask if it is ultimately genuine poetry or not. Her analysis of *Amarustaka* 40 is a case in point:

Her breasts
 were dwarfed
 in a tight embrace
 The hair of her body
 bristled with desire.
 That cloth
 on her glorious hips
 melted away
 in the heat
 of the moment

and with weak words
she urged me,

“Don’t, don’t.
thief of my pride,
don’t. For me,
it’s more than enough”.

Then, I don’t know
was she asleep,
or dead

Did she merge
with my heart?
Did she dissolve
into nothing? (*Amarusataka* 40)

According to the commentator Vemabhūpāla, the *rasa* is a *sambhoga-sṛṅgāra* and the *nāyika* or female character is a *parākīyā*, “a young girl who belongs to another”. In Arjunavarmadeva’s view, “a man who is separated from his lover and who is skilled in sport, with his mind fixed on her alone, contemplates all aspects of a *māninī-nāyika*, a woman who is quick to anger during a love spat and needs instant appeasement.” Selby finds Arjunavarmadeva’s interpretation fascinating as it transforms the poem “from a pleasure-giving object into an object that elicits desire, which is precisely what a critic of the *rasa* school is expected to do” (Selby 72-73). It is an ingenious defence of the unconvincing interpretation of the commentator who would have been puzzled by this understanding of his naïve suggestion. The dominant *rasa* of a great poem should be evident to any intelligent *rasika* or *sahṛdaya*. The wild conjectures of clever critics are not to be taken seriously. As Krishnamoorthy rightly observes, it is the perverted handling of *sṛṅgāra rasa* in the erotic verses that brought a bad name to Sanskrit poetry.

It (the romantic tendency) reinterpreted the *rasa* theory in terms of sensual delight and produced a wave of rankly erotic poetry. The findings of Vatsyayana in his *Kamasūtra* and Bharata in his *Nāṭyaśāstra* were given a new orientation to provide fit themes for the display of unbridled passion and sex ... One who seeks emotional or sexual excitement vicariously from literature is a very interested if not a morbid person; a far cry indeed from the *sahṛdaya*! It was their perverted theory of *rasa* as crude and sexy *sṛṅgāra* which killed the full flowering of all the other *rasas* in our literature (69).

The examples chosen by Selby happen to be erotic verses of the type totally condemned by Krishnamoorthy and what is more amusing is she labours hard to demonstrate that “the authors of these poems were highly conscious of the different elements that are needed to produce *rasa*” (30).

Quoting two poems from *Amarusataka*, she writes,

The second poem in this set is a particularly nice example of a *vipralambha* verse because it employs a number of *anubhavas* prescribed by the *Nāṭyasāstra* for the portrayal of this locus. These *anubhavas* all correspond to several items on the list of the ten symptoms of lovesickness described in Vātsyāyana’s *Kāmasūtra* verse 5.15. (29).

The two poems given as illustrative examples of the two loci (*adḥiṣṭhānas*) recognized by *Nāṭyasastra* for the depiction of *srṅgārarasa* are among the ones viewed by Krishnamoorthy as a blot on the history of Sanskrit poetry.

A woman said this when asked by her girlfriends,
“How was your lover in bed?”

When my lover came to bed,
the knot came untied
all by itself.

My dress,
held up by the strings of a loosened belt,
barely stayed on my hips.

Friend,
that’s as much as I know now.

When he touched my body,
I couldn’t at all remember
who he was
who I was
or how it was (*Amarusataka* 101, *sambhoga*).

A certain woman, weary of her girl friends’
insistence that she should display jealous
anger, scolded them:

Sighs parch my mouth.
 My heart's torn out by the roots.
 Sleep won't come.
 I can't see my lover's face.

Day and night I cry
 and my limbs have withered,
 ever since I ignored my lover
 who had fallen at my feet.
 Friends,
 what good were you counting on
 when you bade me be angry
 at that dear man? (*Amarusataka* 92. vipralambha)

Selby argues that “the charm of the first poem is generated by the woman’s inability to satisfy her girlfriends with an elaborate description of physical details” and that the second poem, “with its list of classic symptoms and complaints, lets the reader know that the woman is still in love with the man” (30). She fails to understand that the first one is decidedly vulgar and the second one nothing more than a series of platitudes and that they cannot come anywhere near any of the Caṅkam poems on love in union and love in separation. But further revealing her lack of poetic sensibility, she ends the analysis claiming that ‘a distancing’ (Ingalls’s ‘supernormal relishing’) should ideally occur between what is represented by a text and its appreciator and that the Tamil tradition does not seem to acknowledge “distancing” as a requirement for proper aesthetic appreciation (30).

She would do well to read any five or six of the Caṅkam poems closely in order to understand what aesthetic distancing really means. Let her know what one soaked in Sanskrit literature and Sanskrit poetics has to say about the lyrics in Sanskrit and Prākṛit and about rasa as a canon of literary criticism:

Let us read all the examples of *uttama* or *uttamottama* Kāvya given by Ānandavardhana, Mammata, Visvanātha, Jagannātha etc. (*attā ettha*, *niḥśeṣacyutta*, etc). Does even one of them appear to us very beautiful, honestly speaking? If such is the fate of vastu-dhvani, let us read the whole work *Sṛṅgāra-tilaka* by Rudrabhatta (*Kāvya-māla* edn 1899) which is exclusively written to illustrate the several ways and means of embodying the best of rasas namely Sṛṅgāra

and incidentally of the others too? Who can say that even one or two among the hundreds of examples there are in good taste? All the conventions of the Nāyikas scrupulously followed therein appear quite exotic and hardly literary. Are intimate bride chamber talks the best expressions of rasa? In other words, can rasas not become an idle convention? (Krishnamoorthy 149).

The truth is that in almost all the Sanskrit lyrics that Selby quotes in her *Grow long, Blessed Night*, rasa has degenerated into an idle convention as handled by poets who prefer pornography to art succumbing to the demands of the time in which they lived. A Caṅkam poet like Virrūru Mūteiyinanār, on the other hand, can achieve the sublime even while painting a bedroom scene. Deborah Cameron suggests that since the word pornography ‘means’ pictures of prostitutes, pornoglossia would be a good name for the language which reduces all women to men’s sexual servants. “Pornoglossia, then is a use of language to describe women purely in terms of their sexual usefulness, availability, or attractiveness to men” (Hawthorn 269). This is what happened to Sanskrit, especially in the hands of the poets whom Selby presents with gusto in her *Grow Long, Blessed Night*. It is this fate of Sanskrit which a great lover of Sanskrit like Krishnamoorthy bemoans.

Herman Tieken, in his *Kavya in South India*, claiming that another instance of Akam poetry is to be found in Hāla’s Sattasāi, quotes the following gāthās among others:

The farmer’s wife (Pāmarī) who failed to reach her climax as her husband had fallen asleep exhausted from dragging the ploughshare through the thick mud, cursed the rainy season. (Gāthā 324)

Look! A miracle! Out of the hard stone of that ripe mango a tender sprout has grown! It looks like the tail-end of an eel hiding in the cavity of a half-opened shell. (Gāthā 62)

We have the erotic image of an eel (penis) hiding in a slightly opened oyster shell (Vulva).

While the husband, feigning to be asleep, turns over and drops his trembling hand on the knot in the young bride’s skirt, she doubled the pressure of her thighs to keep it in place. (Gāthā 648)

No sooner had the husband sat his young bride on his lap or like a

servant standing in attendance, sweat poured down from her body washing away the mud clinging to her feet from her last night's meeting with her lover. (Gāthā 767)

(Tieken 57-77)

These examples clearly reveal that critics like Martha Ann Selby and Herman Tieken do not know or refuse to recognise the distinction between great poetry and simple pornography.

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8. MULLAIPPĀṬṬU: AN ESSAY IN GENRE CRITICISM

It is well-known that in the West, Aristotle was the first one to be interested in identifying a work of art on the basis of the object of imitation, the means of imitation and the manner of imitation and also in distinguishing one genre from another. His admirers claim that the task of defining the tragedy was done to perfection by him. In the twentieth century, the Chicago School of critics, called neo-Aristotelians, championed the cause of genre criticism and faulted the New Critics on having ignored generic distinctions in their close studies of poems, plays and novels. R.S. Crane in his *The Language of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry*, Wayne C. Booth in his *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and Elder Olson in his *Tragedy and the Theory of the Drama* attempted to demonstrate the need to take into consideration the genre of a literary work in its interpretation. Their work kindled a renewal of interest in genre criticism, shared by learned critics like Kenneth Burke, Northrop Frye and Robert Scholes.

Northrop Frye, in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, complaining that the study of genres hasn't gone much beyond what has been done by the Greeks to whom we are indebted for our terminology and our distinctions among some genres, sets out to correct this in his work.

The objective of criticism by genres is not so much to classify as to clarify traditions and affinities, with a view to bringing out a large number of literary relationships that would not be noticed if there were no context established for them.

Making a thorough and penetrating study of modes and genres, Frye claims that a critic's job is to identify the narrative category of a work of art. E.D. Hirsch, on the other hand, insists on the individuality of any given work. In *Validity in Interpretation*, Hirsch stresses that the reader's understanding of meaning is dependent on the reader's perception of the genre that the author intended as he wrote the book. If a work is in a genre different from the one assumed by the reader, he will only be misreading it.

An interpreter's notion of the type of meaning he confronts will powerfully influence his understanding of details. This phenomenon will recur at every level of sophistication and is the primary reason for disagreements among qualified interpreters. . . Understanding can occur only if the interpreter proceeds under the same system (as the speaker or writer)...Every shared type of meaning (every genre) can be defined as a system of conventions (Hirsch 17).

What Guerin states after examining the views of Frye, Hirsch and Scholes is also worth keeping in mind:

Part of the difficulty when they are dealing with genres derives from the fact that pieces of literature do not simply and neatly fall into categories, or genres (even the folk ballad, seemingly obvious as a narrative form, partakes of the lyric, and of the drama, the latter through its dialogue). This difficulty arises from the nature of literature itself; it is original, imaginative, creative and hence individualistic. But regardless of literature's protean quality, our interpretation of it is easier if we can recognize a genre, if we can therefore be provided with a set of expectations and conventions, and if we can then recognize when the expectations are fulfilled and when they are imaginatively adapted. Perhaps one of the most beneficial aspects of engaging in genre criticism is that, in our efforts to decide into what genre a challenging piece falls, we come to experience the literature more fully (310).

The Caṅkam anthology called *Pāṭṭuppāṭṭu* consists of five *ārruppaṭais*, *Maturaikkāñci*, *Mullaippāṭṭu*, *Pāṭṭinappālai*, *Neṭunalvāṭai*, and *Kuṛiñcippāṭṭu*. An *ārruppaṭai* is a guide poem in which an artist having received handsome gifts from a rich patron of arts, meets a fellow artist on his way back and directs him to the same patron describing the way to the chieftain's capital, the city, the love and affection of the patron, the royal feast given by him, the hospitality extended, the priceless presents and the leave-taking. The burden of Māṅkuṭi Marutanār's *Maturaikkāñci* is the poet's advice to the Pandya king *Neṭuñceliyaṇ*, drawing his attention to the ephemeral nature of fame and victory, pleasure and greatness. The other four pertain to the four major genres: *Kuṛiñci* (Poetry of pre-marital love), *mullai* (poetry of idyllic love), *pālai* (song of separation in love) and *neytal* (song of despair in love). The famous anthology does not contain any long poem that belongs to the genre, *marutam* (song of the sulky mood). But this broad classification may be found to belie the real nature

of each of these five works as their contents include much more than the subject matter allotted to the particular genre.

Though *Kāñci* is expected to focus on the transitoriness of the life on earth, *Maturaikkāñci* in its second part glorifies *Neṭuñceliyan*'s achievements, victories, pleasures and luxuries and ends with a prayer that they may last long. There is a fusion of *Akam* and *Puṇam* elements in the other four long poems. *Neṭunalvātai*, a poem of neytal, pictures not only the queen in despair but also the king, who, on the battlefield, is ministering to the needs of his soldiers and animals. *Pāṭṭinappālai*, considered a poem of separation, describes the pomp and wealth of the city of a cōla king, only to conclude with the poet's final decision that even if he gets this city he will not part from his wife. *Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu*, reported to have been written by Kapilar in order to explain to an Aryan king called yālppirama tattan the intricacies of the Tamil *Akam* tradition of pre-marital love, mentions the ideal of self sacrifice and service to humanity and has a long passage on the beauty of nature in the form of a catalogue of a hundred flowers. *Mullaippāṭṭu*, said to be a poem on the mullai theme of *iruttal*, a scene depicting the heroine patiently waiting for the return of the hero, is followed by an equally impressive scene in which the chieftain's camp is portrayed. In all these predominantly *Akam* poems, *Puṇam* motifs are brought in unobtrusively and, as T.P. Meenakshisundaran states, this is a fine representation of the harmonious blending of *Akam* and *Puṇam* in any family life.

Mullaippāṭṭu running to one hundred and three lines, consists in a single long complex sentence having three subordinate clauses marked by three predicates. The first subordinate clause ends with the predicate *Kāñāḷ* (she does not see) in the twenty second line and the second subordinate clause with another *Kāñāḷ* as its predicate in the eightieth line. For the third and final subordinate clause, the predicate "Ālina" (neighed joyfully) occurs in the eighty ninth line and the subject "Mā" (horses) in the very last line of the poem. The poem depicts three dramatic scenes in its three long verse paragraphs.

In a rainy evening, the heroine, whose husband is far away on a military expedition, is seen plunged in inconsolable grief. The heavy rains afflict her further. Just as Lord Māyōn goes abegging as a dwarf to the tyrant Mahabali for three feet of land but grows in size encompassing the wide expanse of this universe, the cloud, first small in stature, after drinking the

water from the sea of the thundering roar, assumes monstrous proportions, soars up high, spreads over the vast space of this earth, hangs on a peak, and ends up as a torrential downpour. Some elderly women go to the outskirts of the ancient well-guarded city, strew the paddy and the fragrant mullai buds carried in a measuring vessel and stand in a reverential mood waiting for the first word to be heard. A shepherdess, clasping her shivering shoulders with her crossed hands, eyes the miserable calves tethered to short ropes and endearingly tells them, "Mothers, led by shepherds, will soon be here". The women take this as a good omen and report it to their mistress assuring her that it is certain that the Lord will return after winning the war and collecting tributes from his foes on the frontier. But her cup of sorrow is full and all their explanations carry no conviction. Her collyrium-painted, lily-like eyes shed drops of tears resembling pearls.

The second part of the poem describes the camp pitched by the hero in a broad jungle tract embraced by a forest stream. The green bushes and the piṭavu trees that used to emit their fragrance far and wide have now been destroyed; the fortresses of the hunters with small hole-like entrances have also been razed to the ground. The camp is surrounded by a fence of thorny plants. It is as widespread as the sea of noisy waves. There are rows of houses roofed with leaves in straight streets. A small eyed elephant with its musth-oozing cheeks standing at the junction of four branching roads, refuses to eat the sweet leaves or the tall majestic sugar-canes together with sheaves of paddy. It wipes its forehead with the bundle and twists it on to its spear-sharp tusk. But its young illiterate keepers repeating certain words force it with their pronged goads to eat. Tents have been erected by planting poles bound tight with ropes. Quivers that hang on the bows used in just and fearless wars resemble the orange coloured cloth left to dry on the triple staff of the Brahmin recluse. Lances with their heads full of flower designs are planted round this tent and shields are fixed up in a row. This palisade of bows serves as a strong rampart. In the midst of the huge, multi-tongued army, there is an inner tent made of long poles and screened by many coloured curtains. The girls that appear here have bracelet-bedecked fore-arms and tresses falling down their narrow backs. The bright dirks of firm hilts they are wearing on their many coloured breast-bands change the night into day. With the oiling can they carry, they light the dying lamps arranged in rows. At midnight, just as flowering jasmine vines move when shaken by the breeze in drizzling rain, the trusted royal body-guards grown grey in service, wrapped up in white dress, go on their rounds in a drowsy state keeping a careful vigil. The servants who

can calculate the hour without mistake appear before their chief and offer their obeisance and salutation with joined hands hailing him with the benediction of a long life and declaring to him, "you who have vanquished your foes on the earth encircled by the raging seas, the time according to your hour glass is this much."

The chief is found in an inner apartment built by the Yavanas, who are armed with whips concealed within their tight and bulging dress. With sturdy frames and fierce eyes, they are of frightful mien. The comfortable royal retreat artistically decorated hangs on tiger-shaped chains. The reflecting light of the beautiful crystals in the room illuminates everything. The thick rope draws out the screen in a circle and creates a room within a room. The barbarians, who slipping into their roles stand guard, can speak only the body language.

Overwhelmed with a passionate desire for a further fight, the king does not sleep. He is sad about the male elephants that went to fight, suffered much from wounds received from lances hurled at them, and now keep standing oblivious of their beloved mates. He also thinks of those valiant heroes, who cut down huge trunks of elephants that writhed in pain like snakes, who set aright their honey bubbling wreaths which became their laurels of victory and who laid down their lives in grateful recognition of the royal food they had eaten. He is terribly worried about the horses whose armours of leather were pierced by sharp-edged arrows, whose ears drooped and whose excruciating pain made them refuse any food. The king cogitates for long resting one of his hands on the bed while the armlet of the other hand is pressed to his crown. With his strong fingers which are used to holding weapons aimed at the enemies, he keeps in order the drooping garland of lustrous glory. The war drum in the camp thunders.

The first section of the third part describes the lady who at the moment does not see the lord whom she has known as the one that enjoys sweet sleep. Shattered by grief, she directs her thoughts towards him. Her feeling of desolation upsets her mind. Reflecting long, she consoles herself and sets her loosened bangles right. She heaves up a deep sigh and quakes like a peacock struck with arrows. Her jewels slip down; the lamp glows to burning heat with its thick flame. The seven storeyed palace is lofty and high. Abundant streams of rain pour through the bending valley of the roof. She is lying there, her ears filled with sweet and swelling sounds. The pleasing noises of pompous sonority made by the horses resonate through the innermost recesses of her ears.

With his large troops, the victor that won the lands so dear to his foes is returning. The banner of victory has been raised aloft; the conches and trumpets sound loudly befitting the triumphs. The *Konrai* with bunches of sprouts and flowers throws forth its pure gold. The conical buds of the *Kōṭal* open up their palms. The clusters of *Tōnri* that bloom are blood-red. The royal road of red earth runs through this forest. Well-watered by timely rains, the ears of the millet droop down with their millet. The stags with twisted horns frisk and dart forth with hinds. This is the month when the white clouds which had marched in opposite directions start pouring down their showers. The hero leaves behind the woods where Valli roots are overgrown. He comes fast quickening the pace of the fast running gallop of the horses which adorn the lofty chariot of perfect craftsmanship.

What is the genre of *Mullaippāṭṭu*? According to *Tolkāppiyam*, of the materials of a poem only three things are of vital importance: mutal (time and place), karu (native elements), uri (human feeling). True love is treated under five physiographical divisions:

| | | | |
|---------|----------------|---|----------------------|
| Kuṛiñci | (hilly region) | — | puṇartal (union) |
| Mullai | (forest) | — | iruttal (patience) |
| Marutam | (fields) | — | ūṭal (sulking) |
| Neytal | (sea-coast) | — | iraṅkal (despair) |
| Pālai | (desert) | — | pirital (separation) |

Mullai represents the forests presided over by Māyōn, the Dark one and the puṇattinai which corresponds to mullai is vañci, whose theme is invasion.

| | | | | |
|---------|---|--------|---|-------------|
| Kuṛiñci | — | Veṭchi | — | cattle raid |
| Mullai | — | Vañci | — | invasion |
| Marutam | — | uḷiñai | — | siege |
| Neytal | — | Tumpai | — | war |
| Pālai | — | Vākai | — | victory |

In his interpretation of *Mullaippāṭṭu*, the formidable commentator Naccinārkkiniyar takes the genre of the poem to be mullai since the poet has chosen to call it *Mullaippāṭṭu* which opens with a reference to Māyōn, the presiding deity of mullai and which describes the patient waiting of a lady separated from her husband who, with his army, has gone away to invade another country. Naccinārkkiniyar strongly feels that while interpreting Caṅkam writings one has to keep in mind the poetic

conventions mentioned by Tolkāppiyar and not those of the latter day grammarians if there are variations and that one should respect the explicit as well as implicit intentions of the author of a poem when they are known. What is expected of a mullai heroine is that she should patiently wait for the hero's return at the appointed time without losing hope, without giving room for despair and despondency. But the general impression given by Nappūtanār's poem is that the feeling of sorrow is more dominant than patience. Its heroine weeps, trembles, sighs, becomes pale and lean, keeps lying prostrate much to the consternation of her companions who try to console her in all possible ways but apparently fail in their mission. All this may go against the grain of a mullai poem but Naccinārkkīṇiyar does not surrender to the temptation of claiming that the poet has consciously or unconsciously committed a mistake in the representation of the feeling of patience. Being a seasoned interpreter thoroughly soaked in Tolkāppiyam-*Caṅkam* poetic conventions, he sets out to defend the poet and to justify the title.

Naccinārkkīṇiyar reads all the symptoms of despair in the poem – the queen's shedding tears, her lying on the cot, her jewels falling off her limbs – as referring to the day of separation when the heroine felt that the hero might leave her. The verbal omen sought by the lady's companions is also an occurrence of the past when they tried to persuade her that the impending separation from her husband was inevitable because he, as a hero, had to undertake the expedition which would certainly bring him fame and victory. They might have also told her that the mighty enemies could be defeated only by him and that if it was not done, he would lose his reputation and become an object of ridicule. All this is implied in the significant repetition of the word *Kāṭṭavum* (1.22):

“Though they explained and explained, she found no comfort.”

In this interpretation, the heroine's desperate behavior took place before the king left the palace with a view to invading the enemy country and not on the eve of his return after the war. There are two phrases, besides the title of the poem and the reference to *Māyōn*, which may be cited in support of Naccinārkkīṇiyar's stand. In one context, it is said that the heroine reflects for a long time: “*nīṭu niṇaintu*” (1.82). This indicates that she is able to console herself and is aware of her duty as a chaste wife and that she has almost overcome her feeling of sorrow. In another place, it is said that she is lying on her cot looking forward to his return: “*ōrppaṇaḷ kiṭantōḷ*” (1.88). This underlines the *uripporuḷ* of mullai.

But in order to interpret the poem in this manner, the learned commentator seeks refuge in the theory of māṭṭu as described by Tolkāppiyar and makes the first part of the poem a very long prologue. According to other commentators, there are two references to the verbal omen in two lines referring to two different occasions. The first one is the omen heard by the warriors during their first march and this would have certainly taken place at the time of separation from her husband. The second one is the omen heard by the lady's companions. The narrator, who is perhaps one of her companions, states that she has heard of the first verbal omen also. If this suggests that there was a divination at the time of the king's departure, then the major part of the poem has to be assumed to refer to this initial starting period. This is what Naccinārkkiniyar does when he takes back everything to the time of the king's leaving the palace for war. In the commentator's view, the various lines of the poem in order to yield this meaning, have to be taken in the following order:

Perumutu peṇṭir(11), nallōr (18), pōkit (9), tūuyttolutu (10), viricci nirpa(11), avar kēṭṭa naṇṇar (17), vāyppuḷ (18), āymakaḷ (13), kaiyaṭakik(14), kaṇṇin (12), alamaranōkkit(13), tāyar innē varukuvarenpōḷuṭaiya (16), nanmoliyāka yānkaḷ kēṭṭamai; atan karuttāl (17), talaivar varutal vāyvatu(20); nalla kāriyam (18); māyōy(21), nīnin(20) paruvāral evvam kaḷaiyenru kūra(21) atukēṭṭu nīṭu nīnaintu (82)

Naccinārkkiniyar concludes his interpretation contending that this is in accordance with Tolkāppiyar's view while the interpretations by others do not fit in with the grammatical tradition. But, in the twentieth century, the very interpretation to which the medieval commentator took objection, was upheld by Maṛaimalai Aṭikaḷ with fresh justification.

Aṭikaḷ takes him to task for his excessive reliance on and "abuse" of māṭṭu. In Aṭikaḷ's view, it is like tearing an exquisite saree of silk and gold to pieces and then putting them together according to the whims and fancies of a designer. He asserts that the mullai effect of patient waiting is not destroyed so long as the end of the poem is free from the contamination by despair. Excepting for the single reference to the heroine's tears in line no 23 of *Mullaippāṭṭu*, there is no suggestion of despair. Emphasizing the significance of the 82nd line – "consoling herself after a careful consideration and setting right her loosened bangles" he justifies his conception of mullai as chastity, as implicit obedience, as not saying anything against the word of the Lord ("Coltīrampāmai"). Without disturbing the word-order or the

line-arrangement, Aṭikaḷ claims that the genre of *Mullaippāṭṭu* is *mullai* only and not *neytal* or *pālai*. When the lady-love separated from her lover patiently waits for his return, the sentiment has to be accepted as *mullai*. If she yields to despair then it has to be considered *neytal*. When she is all alone and expresses her inconsolable grief to the sea or to some other natural object, it comes under *neytal*. But when there are people to console her, or when she is able to bear the grief with fortitude after reflection, there is no question of *neytal*. It is enough if patient waiting is the dominant element in a *mullai* poem and it will not matter if there are one or two occasions on which symptoms of despair occur. In Sanskrit dramas, the *rasa* of a particular work is decided by what is dominant irrespective of the occasional intrusions of other *rasas*.

Aṭikaḷ lists the “mistakes” committed by Naccinārkkiniyar in his overenthusiasm to show that the *mullai* discipline is sustained throughout *Mullaippāṭṭu*. When they try to console the heroine, the elderly women mention the omen deciphered by the warriors on the eve of their march in addition to the divination of the future by the first word heard by them. Naccinārkkiniyar does not care to explain the passage that implies the latter but goes out of the way to stress the former. The Tolkāppiyam convention has nothing against looking for auspicious omens by people other than warriors. The phrase, “*etiṛcel veṇmaḷai poliṇṇu tiṅkaḷ*” (l. 100) is wrongly interpreted by the veteran commentator as he is not able to rightly identify the month as *Avani*, which is the first month of the winter. The term “*pacalaikkaṇṇu* (l. 12) means “very young calf” but Naccinārkkiniyar takes it to mean “miserable calf”. The passage which describes the young maids that wear shining dirks and light the lamps in the camp (l. 45-49) has also baffled the veteran interpreter who leaves the subject “*maṅkaiyar*” dangling without a predicate.

Ably presenting the quarrel between the two commentators, T.P. Meenakshisundaran, by his interpretation, adds a new dimension to the great Caṅkam poem. He believes that the medieval commentator is not justified in relying heavily on *māṭṭu*:

But how to take away the phrases from their natural setting in poetry? For instance, this very 82nd line looks like enumerating certain states of mental despondency, connecting them all with the conjunction “and” (*um*) added to every word, the same conjunction being found added to the words occurring in subsequent lines of despair. How to tear one line, rather one phrase away from its context? (19).

In curious exercises of versification plenty of artificial arrangements of words may be found. But the Caṅkam works such as *Mullaippāṭṭu* are long-drawn poems of poetic beauty and artistic perfection.

It is not a stone or a metal to be chiselled and polished into the required shape; much less a cloth to be torn and stitched to the desired form or fashion. It is a perfection of art standing or falling by its absolute poetic value. Any suggested improvement or tampering with it, is vandalism pure and simple (21).

Though Maṛaimalai Aṭikaḷ keeps the poem in tact and attempts a harmonious interpretation, T.P. Meenakshisundaran is of the view that Aṭikaḷ hasn't succeeded in demonstrating that there is only patient waiting and no despair in the poem.

Even on his own interpretation, the feeling of despair reigns supreme to start with in the poem; then later on, on his own showing it continues to struggle for supremacy with her feeling of chastity only to yield to the latter its victory and to disappear in the end (T.P.M. 23).

Aṭikaḷ's contention that despair comes only in the absence of any one to console, and not as here where there are people to console is also wrong.

Neytal is indeed despair and desolation. But this feeling may arise not only in the presence of the companion but also, even in the company of the beloved himself – not to speak of the company of friends as in Akam 120 and a host of other poems. Mere physical presence does not give the experience of a sharing. Even in this very poem the climax of despair or 'sōka' is reached by the helpless heroine in tears, in the very presence and inspite of the trusted attendants of age and sympathy, consoling her all round (T.P.M. 23).

Neither the medieval commentator nor the modern one succeeds in his attempt to save "mullai" from "pālai" and "neytal" overshadowing and eclipsing it. T.P. Meenakshisundaran observes that the poem instead of ending as a poem of separation (pālai) or desolation (neytal) escapes from their eclipse and concludes in all its grandeur as a song of joyous reunion. If in a poem there is a direct or indirect hint that the hero and the heroine will get reunited, it has to be considered a mullai poem. If, on the other hand, the feeling of separation is dominant throughout, it is a neytal poem.

There is, however, no doubt that the main sentiment of *Mullaippāṭṭu* is the feeling of joyful union. That is the final climax of the poem. Can we say that the feeling of separation and despair developed all through the major portion of the poem is only an incidental emotion just to throw into greater relief the final joy of reunion? (T.P.M 32).

Dividing the one long sentence of *Mullaippāṭṭu* into its three subordinate clauses with their own predicates, T.P. Meenakshisundaran points out how the heroine happens to be the protagonist of the poem serving as a bridge that links the three parts. The poem fully exploits the glory and suggestive richness of mullai as a symbol as it derives its title from the beautiful phrase it uses “naṟuvī mullai”.

....It is because of this pre-eminent position that this flower has gained the loftiest significance of chastity of which it stands as a unique symbol all over India, in all times, with its unsullied purity and innocence of white colour, with its charm of suffused light and fragrance, with a ray of hope as it were in the midst of the gloom of the advancing darkness, with its shivering tenderness evoking pity, and with its sweet radiance of a welcome smile. In this poem itself, this white bud, slowly blossoming into a fragrant flower inviting, with its sweet honey, the bees to hum around it like the music of a lyre, offers thus a veritable feast to the five senses, with its humming lyrical music to the ear, with its sweet fragrance to the nose, with its velvety softness to the touch, with its beautiful form of white colour to the eye and with its pure nectar to the tongue (T.P.M. 9).

What appears as a simple love poem finally proves to be a profound work of art tracing the spiritual evolution of the hero and the heroine. The poet reveals to us in the most concrete poetic form the highest conception and spiritual significance of mullai. “Vañci” and “Mullai” are brought together here both externally and internally. The physical victory is sublimated into a moral and spiritual victory by mullai; the righteous indignation of vañci elevates the love and feeling of identity to universal consciousness. In *Mullaippāṭṭu* the poet bringing in all the situations of mullai, fuses the overwhelming duty of the war, the companion’s counsel, the onset of season, the concern for the hero, the return of the hero, the joy of the attendants, and finally, the identity of the hero and the heroine, their sharing of the duties, and the spiritual growth of their joint personality through all this experience projecting the glorious Caṅkam vision of mullai.

T.P. Meenakshisundaran is convinced of the impact of Asoka's personality and message on *Mullaippāṭṭu*. As the messiah of peace and virtue, Asoka was popular in the entire country. His pillars engraved with his message of peace and dharma were found all over India and there was one at Kanchipuram, as mentioned by Hiuen Tsang. The Tamil land would have certainly been conscious of Asoka's conversion after the Kalinga war. If his name is not mentioned in the poem, it is because the Akam tradition forbids it. Aṭikaḷ suggests that Pāṇḍyan Neṭuñceliyaṇ may be the hero glorified in the poem. But T.P. Meenakshisundaran believes that though the Tamil King might have been in the mind of the poet we may not be wrong in concluding that the Asokan spirit would have dominated the poet's vision while composing the poem.

Though each of the three interpretations of *Mullaippāṭṭu* discussed here has its own merits and limitations, there can be no doubt that *Mullaippāṭṭu* yields much to every serious attempt at genre criticism.

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9. *KURINĀCIPPĀṬṬU*: KAḶAVUMAṆAM AND GANDHĀRVA MARRIAGE

At the end of the commentary by Naccinārkkiniyar on *Kuriñcippāṭṭu*, there is a note to the effect that Kapilar composed the idyll in order to teach Tamil to the Aryan king Pirahattan. The two *venpās* appended to the poem sketch its subject matter. The first one states,

It is not your fault; the lady is also a virtuous one. I don't know any fault of mine either. The lord of the hilly land, to the best of my knowledge, is free from blame.

The heroine's confidante tells her mother that for what has happened nobody can be blamed. The reference is to the clandestine love between the heroine and the chieftain. The second short poem contends that the virtue of *kuriñci* is as good as that of the fifth type of wedding mentioned by Maṛaiyōr and that its subject matter is in praise of *aṛam*, *poruḷ* and *iṇpam*. From these two poetic statements, it may be inferred that the teaching of Tamil here means an exposition of the *akam* tradition of clandestine love and that the union of the well matched hero and heroine who fell in love with each other at first sight is in no way inferior to the Gandharva wedding of the Aryans.

There has been a well orchestrated campaign in certain quarters in favour of the view that the so-called Gandharva marriage served as a model for the Tamils' Kaḷavumaṇam and that even for the idea of one man-one wife, the Tamil community was indebted to the Aryans. And the most important piece of evidence produced by them is that *Tolkāppiyam*, *Iraiyanār Kaḷaviyaḷ* and the medieval commentaries compare Kaḷavumaṇam to Gandharva wedding. If the Tamil Kaḷavumaṇam was the same as or similar to the Aryan Gandharva wedding, Kapilar could have easily informed the Aryan king of it and left it there. But the fact that he came out with a jewel of a poem illustrating Kaḷavumaṇam indicates that the Tamils and the Aryans of his time thought that the Tamil wedding practice differed radically from every one of the eight unions of the sexes mentioned by Maṛaiyōr.

For a faithful account of the eight types including the Gandharva marriage, one should go to *The Laws of Manu* and *Kamasutra* and not to the Tamil texts which abound in interpolations by vested interests. The third chapter of the former enumerates the duties of those that get married once the state of bachelorhood comes to an end. Its themes are: Entering the householder stage, Choosing a wife, Qualities to avoid in a wife, Wives of Various classes, The Eight Forms of Marriage, Results of Good and Bad Marriages, Begetting children, Against the Bride-price, The importance of Treating Women Well, The Importance of Vedic Verses, The Five Great Sacrifices, The Importance of the Householder, Duties of the householder, Offerings to the Gods, Propitiatory offerings, Giving Alms, Treatment of Guests, Eating Leftovers, The Honey mixture, The Ceremony for the Dead, People to invite to the ceremony for the Dead, More people to invite to the ceremony for the Dead, More people Not to invite to the ceremony for the Dead, Types of Adulterers Not to invite, People who should not be at the ceremony for the Dead, Still More People to invite to the ceremony for the Dead, The Invitation to the ceremony for the Dead, Ancestors of the Ancestors, The Ritual to the gods, Preparing the ceremony for the Dead, The Ritual to the gods, The ceremony for the Dead, The meal, The Entertainment, Potential Pollutions at the meal, Feeding uninvited guests, More potential Pollutions at the meal, The End of the ceremony, Disposing of leftovers, Benefits of offering various Foods, Auspicious Days for the ceremony, Fruits of the Ceremony (Manu vi). From this outline itself, one may guess that the work is the outcome of a society filled with superstition and ignorance and that these are not the concerns of the “Kaḷaviyal” and “karpiyal” of Tolkāppiyar’s *Poruḷatikāram*. Insisting on the caste hierarchy, Manu states that a twice born man should marry a wife who is of the same class and has the right marks.

A woman who is neither a co-feeding relative on her mother’s side nor belongs to the same lineage (of the sages) on her father’s side, and who is a virgin, is recommended for marriage to twice born men. When a man connects himself with a woman, he should avoid the ten following families, even if they are great or rich in cows, goats, sheep, property, or grain: a family that has abandoned the rites, or does not have male children, or does not chant the Veda; and those families in which they have hairy bodies, piles, consumption, weak digestion, epilepsy, white leprosy, or black leprosy.

A man should not marry a girl who is a redhead or has an extra limb or is sickly or has no body hair or too much body hair or talks too much

or is fallow, or who is named after a constellation, a tree, or a river, or who has a low caste name, or has a menial or frightening name, who walks like a goose or an elephant, whose body hair and hair on the head is fine, whose teeth are not big, and who has delicate limbs. A wise man will not marry a woman who has no brother or whose father is unknown, for fear that she may be an appointed daughter or that he may act wrongly.

A woman of the same class is recommended to twice-born men for the first marriage; but for men who are driven by desire, these are the women, in progressively descending order. According to tradition, only a servant woman can be the wife of a servant; she and one of his own class can be the wife of a commoner; these two and one of his own class for a king; and these three and one of his own class for a priest. Not a single story mentions a servant woman as the wife of a priest or a ruler, even in extremity. Twice-born men who are so infatuated as to marry women of low caste quickly reduce their families, including the descendants, to the status of servants. A man falls when he weds a servant woman, according to Atri and to (Gautama) the son of Utathya or when he has a son by her, according to Saunaka, or when he has any children by her, according to Bhṛgu. A priest who climbs into bed with a servant woman goes to hell; if he begets a son in her, he loses the status of priest. The ancestors and the gods do not eat the offerings to the gods, to the ancestors, and to guests that such a man makes with her, and so he does not go to heaven. No redemption is prescribed for a man who drinks the saliva from the lips of a servant woman or is tainted by her breath or begets a son in her (Manu 44 – 45).

From the above account, it should be clear that it was a caste conscious uncultured society to which the dharma of one man-one wife was unknown. Following this, Manu declares that he will teach the eight ways of marrying women that are for all four classes, for better and for worse, here on earth and after death.

The marriages named after Brahmā, the gods, the sages, the lord of creatures, the demons, the centaurs, the ogres, and eighth and lowest, the ghouls. It should be understood that the first six, as they are listed in order are right for a priest, the last four for a ruler, and these same four, with the exception of the ogre marriage, for a commoner or a servant. The poets say that the first four are recommended for a priest, only one, the ogre marriage, for a ruler, and the demon marriage for a commoner and a servant. But here, three of the last five are right, while two – those of the ghouls and the demons are traditionally regarded as wrong and are never to be performed. Two of the marriages mentioned above, those according to the centaurs and the ogres, are traditionally

regarded as right for rulers, whether they are used separately or combined (Manu 45).

Manu here giving the Gandharva marriage the sixth place says that it is not good for the priests. Claiming to explain all the qualities of these marriages as proclaimed by Manu, it is later added that the Gandharva marriage is not acceptable and positively harmful.

If a son born to a woman who has had a Brahmā marriage does good deeds, he frees from guilt ten of the ancestors who came before him, ten later descendants, and himself as the twenty first. A son born to a woman who had a marriage of the gods frees seven ancestors and seven descendants, a son born to a woman who had a marriage of the sages frees three of each, and a son born to a woman who had a marriage of the lord of creatures frees six of each. The sons born from these four marriages, in order beginning with the Brahma marriage, are filled with the splendor of the Veda and are esteemed by educated men. Beautiful and endowed with the quality of lucidity, rich and famous, enjoying life to the fullest, most religious, they live for a hundred years. But from those four other remaining bad marriages with women come blameworthy progeny. Blameworthy progeny come to men from blameworthy marriages; therefore one should avoid the blameworthy ones. (Manu 47)

The Gandharva marriage is here condemned as a blameworthy marriage out of which only cruel sons will be born. Wendy Doniger, who has translated *The Rig Veda, The Laws of Manu* and *Kāmasūtra*, into English points out that the term Gandharva marriage became a euphemism in Sanskrit literature for an otherwise unsanctioned sexual union, ie, one witnessed by these creatures (Doniger 46). In one place Manu says that for priests, the gift of a girl with (a libation of) water is the best marriage; but for the other classes the best is when they desire one another (Manu 46). Since this is a contradiction of what has been said earlier, the passage is certain to have been interpolated later by those that were aware of the glorious place given to Kaḷavumaṇam by the Tamils.

Kāmasūtra also describes the eight types of marriages but differs from the rankings according to Manu. In Vatsyayana's view Brahma wedding is better than the love-match wedding, which is better than the wedding of the Demons, the Demons better than the ghouls, and the ghouls better than the ogres. After listing them in this manner, he gives two short poems which praise the love-match wedding.

For since mutual love is the fruit
of wedding, therefore even
the love-match wedding, though of middling rank
Is respected as a means to a good end.

Indeed, the love match wedding is regarded as the best of all, because it gives pleasure and costs little trouble and no formal courtship, and because its essence is mutual love.

In the first stanza, the praise is qualified but in the second unqualified. But when he describes the variants of the Gandharva marriage, we realize that what he has in mind is something that does not resemble the *Kalavumaṇam* even remotely.

When the girl has been won over and waits for him in the place of assignation, the man marries her by taking consecrated fire from the house of a Brahmin who knows the Veda, spreading sacred grass on the ground, making an offering of oblations in accordance with the ritual texts, and circumambulating the fire three times, only then does he inform her mother and her father, because the scholars' rule says, "Weddings witnessed by the consecrated fire cannot be reworked." And after he has taken her maidenhead, he gradually informs his own people. Then he gets her relatives to give her to him, in order to wipe out the stain on the family honour and out of fear of reprisals. Immediately, he wins over her relatives with endearing gifts and by his love. That is how he carries out a love-match wedding (*Kamasutra* 92).

But that it is not a case of mutual love becomes evident when Vatsyayana proceeds to point out how the lady's love should be won.

If he is not winning her over, he enlists the help of another girl of good family, who moves freely between both houses, who is affectionate and was in the past intimate, and he has her bring the girl with her to an accessible place on some pretext. Then he brings the fire from the house of a Brahmin who knows the Veda, and so forth, just the same as above. If a wedding is to take place soon, he makes the girl's mother regret it because of the faults in the other groom that he brings to her attention, and then, with the mother's permission the man is brought to a neighbour's house at night, and he brings the fire from the house of a Brahmin who knows the Veda, and so forth, just the same as above. Or the girl may have a brother of the same age as the man, who is addicted to courtesans and to the wives of other men; the man wins his love by doing him endearing favours and giving him help in difficult affairs, for a very long time. In the end, he confides his intentions to him. For, in general, young men will even give up their lives for the sake of contemporaries of the same character, vices and

age. Therefore, the brother is the one that he gets to bring her to an accessible place on some pretext, and so forth, just the same as above (*Kamasūtra* 92).

In the Gandharva marriage, as explained by Vatsyayana, what is important is that it should be consecrated by fire brought from a brahmin's house, though the love of the lady is not required or may be won by all kinds of fraudulent means. Whereas Manu lists eight weddings, Vatsyayana lists only four official weddings but without naming the other four deals with them and seems to regard them as variations on the Gandharva wedding (*Kamasūtra* 198).

Tolkāppiyam describes the dynamics of what it calls Kaḷavumaṇam in "Kaḷaviyal". Of the seven phases of love, only the middle five (kuriñci, mullai, marutam, neytal, pālai) are the subject of true love poetry. The hero and heroine should be well matched and such a well matched pair alone is capable of the full range of love: union and separation, anxiety, patience, betrayal, forgiveness. Kaikkilāi which means "base relationship in unrequited love, ie, desire inflicted on an immature girl who will be unable to understand it. Peruntiṇai, which means "major type", is loveless relationship, ie, coming together of a man and a woman mismatched in age, for lust, convenience or duty. According to the first nūṛpa of "kaḷaviyal" it is associated with the Aintiṇai that resembles the Gandharva marriage, one of the eight types (*Tolkāppiyam* 1035).

Since the comparison is odious, the passage is evidently an interpolation.

Many of the other types of marriages mentioned by Manu and Vatsyayana are worse than the Gandharva one.

In a wedding in the manner of the Demons (asuras),
a man takes the girl because he wants her
himself, when he has given as much wealth
as he can to her relatives and to the girl
herself (Manu 3.31).

In the manner of the ogres (rakshasas), a man forcibly carries off a girl
out of her house, screaming and weeping after he has killed, wounded
and broken (Manu 3.33).

In the lowest and most evil of marriages, known as that of the ghouls (pishas), a man secretly has sex with a girl who is asleep, drunk, or out of her mind (Manu 3.34).

After describing the devious devices for weddings, Vatsyayana adds that “with regard to maintaining religion, each form of wedding is better than the one that follows it, but each time the preceding one is not possible, *the following one should be used*” (*Kamasūtra* 93).

Listing the first four as the marriages named after Brahma, the gods, the sages and the lord of creatures, Manu gives very brief accounts of them:

It is said to be the law of Brahmā when a man dresses his daughter and adorns her and he himself gives her as a gift to a man he has summoned, one who knows the revealed canon and is of good character. They call it the law of the gods when a man adorns his daughter and, in the course of a sacrifice gives her as a gift to the officiating priest who is properly performing the ritual. It is called the sages’ law when he gives away his daughter by the rules, after receiving from the bridegroom a cow and a bull, or two cows and bulls in accordance with the law. The tradition calls it the rule of the lord of creatures when a man gives away his daughter after adorning her and saying “may the two of you together fulfil your duties” (Manu 3.27-30).

It may be noted that in none of these is the bride’s opinion taken into consideration.

Iraiyānār Akapporuḷ’s version of the eight types of weddings differs from Manu’s significantly though not radically. Piramam (‘*aranilai*’ in Tamil) designates the handing over of a twelve-year-old virgin, decked with jewels, to a bachelor who remains unmarried till the age of forty eight. If a Brahmin girl is not given in marriage when she is twelve, her parents will be guilty of the murder of one Brahmin for every month’s delay. Piracāpattiyam (‘*Oppu*’ in Tamil) refers to giving a girl in marriage to the one of the right *gotra* if he comes forward to accept her. By Āṛiṭam (‘*poruḷkōḷ*’ in Tamil) is meant giving a bride to someone by placing her between a cow and a bull whose horns and feet are decorated with gold and by performing the water pouring ritual. Deyva (‘*Teyvam*’ in Tamil) means offering the bride to the priest that conducts the sacrifice before the sacrificial fire. Gandharuvam (‘*yālōr kūṭṭam*’ in Tamil) indicates the joining together of the two desirous of each other of their own accord. Acuram (‘*arumporu vinai nīlai*’ in Tamil) consists in declaring that the girl will be offered to the one that tames a bull or bends a particular bow or kills three pigs by a single arrow or the one that is chosen by the girl and getting it done that way. Rākkatam (‘*Irākkatam*’ in Tamil) is the name given to

capturing forcefully a woman without her willingness and the consent of her relatives. Paicācam ('Pēynilai' in Tamil) is nothing but molesting a woman who is unconscious or asleep or drunk.

In all these weddings the ceremonies are more important than anything else and the bride's wishes are completely ignored in each of them excepting the Gandharva marriage. Where acuram is concerned, it is added that the girl may be given the right to choose her partner. But what was known as Svayamvara in which a princess could choose her husband is mentioned only in puranas like *Padmapurana* and epics like *Raghuvamsa* and not in *The Laws of Manu* or in *Kamasutra*. For the Brahma kind, recommended by Manu as the best, the male should be forty eight and the female should be below twelve!

While interpreting the kaḷaviyal nūrpa alluding to the eight weddings of Maṛaiyōr, the Tolkappiyam commentary cites eight poems describing them. This account is closer to the one in Iṛaiyanār kaḷaviyal than to the ones by Manu and Vatsyayana. If a virgin, before she attains puberty, is decked with costly ornaments and given to a Brahmin whose status is equal to hers by performing the ceremony of water-pouring, the wedding is called piramam. If a girl is offered by her parents together with relatives to some one by giving twice the wealth he gave, without violating the rules the wedding is called piracāpattiyam. If the bride is placed in between cows of the same class and the bride's father offers her paying his respects and enough wealth to an honourable bridegroom, it is called Āṛiṭam. In a big city, if a well decorated bride standing before the sacrificial fire into which ghee is poured is given in marriage in accordance with the law to someone who desires her, it is teyvam. After announcing that the one who seeks her hand should perform such and such deeds, if the bride's father gives her to the one who does all of them, it is the traditional kind of Acuram. If some one lusting for a bejeweled lady takes her forcefully, it is the wedding of the big shouldered irākkatar. When the bride's people are unwilling, if some one approaches her stealthily, removes her dress and copulates with her by force without getting her consent and without giving her money, it is the marriage of the ghouls which have no bodies. If a man and a woman, in constant love with each other, meet and get united, it is said to be the marriage of the yāl wielding gandharvas.

The account given by the commentator of the Gandharva wedding here is found to be very different from the one given by Vatsyayana and

Manu and one may easily conclude that this version has been deliberately made to resemble what the Tamils called *kaḷavu maṇam* and has nothing to do with the original Gandharva marriage as conceived by the Aryans.

One of the best of the ten idylls of the Caṅkam period, *Kuṛiṅcippāttu*, consisting of 261 lines, was written by Kapilar in *āciriyaṇṇā* metre. Conforming to what Tolkāppiyar calls *arattoṇṇirral* the poem is in the form of a statement by the heroine's companion who reveals the secret courtship of the former to her mother so that the parents may give their consent to the wedding which will end her misery. The signs of love in a young lady, as enumerated in the eighth stanza of "kaḷaviyal" of *Tolkāppiyam*, are present in the heroine: pining away day by day, being terribly emaciated, looking forward to the fruition of love, loss of coyness, neglect of duties, fainting and unconsciousness. But her mother, not knowing the cause, is worried, consults soothsayers and worships the gods by strewing fair blossoms and offering perfumes. She sees her daughter's beauty fading, her shoulders growing thin and her bangles slipping. When the heroine is pressed to state the cause of her grief by her confidante, she says, "The jewels made of pearls, gems and gold, if ruined, may be set right. But if virtue, nobility and reputation are lost, even holy men cannot restore them to their original state. Though fully conscious of my parent's love for me, ignoring the safeguards of my father, we have both opted for this union. And if we announce the fact of this match, should we be blamed for that? Even if he doesn't join me now, we will be united in the world to come".

The heroine's friend feels oppressed by two great fears just like the noble men who undertake the task of reconciling two mighty kings at war with each other. She tells the mother that they took the bold step of seeking advice from none and without thinking about the consequences. Then she dwells at length on the first meeting and the courtship of the pair of lovers making it clear that every occurrence leading to the final decision was beyond their control. It was the mother herself who sent them to the millet field to drive the parrots away. They did their duty sincerely with *taḷal*, *tattai*, *kuḷir* and other instruments employed in turn. Occasionally they enjoyed themselves by swimming in the streams, playing and singing songs to their heart's content. They rinsed the water from their braided locks which on their backs shone like sapphire set on gold. Their eyes all red, they gathered a vast variety of flowers from the nearby fields, piled them up on rain washed rocks, wore garments strung of leaves culled there around their girdles and lay beneath the asoka trees whose shoots appeared like flaming fire.

When they were spending their time happily like this, a youth appeared on the scene. His well-oiled curly hair was smeared with sweet unguents; his imposing head was decked with cool and fragrant wreaths; pretty garlands of lovely flowers were worn around his body; his sturdy breast was rubbed well with sandal paste; his stout hands held a painted bow and choice arrows; a belt was worn securely round his waist; his golden anklets made a tinkling sound on his perfect legs. His big clawed hounds, their teeth shining bright like bamboo shoots, got wild when some one crossed their paths. Since the ladies were encircled by the hunting dogs, they were scared and attempted to run away from there. Looking like a victorious bull that drives away its rivals when it sees a strange cow, he spoke to them in a gentle manner, praised their beauty and pleaded with them to help him in his search for his lost game. Tearing a flowering twig he silenced the harsh bark of his hounds. But suddenly, they heard the roaring noise of a ruttish tusker. Not knowing how to save themselves and forgetting modest ways that are dearer than life itself, they ran to him seeking his protection. He shot his long notched arrows at the shapely face of the tusker and wounded its fair forehead from which blood began to flow. The beast had to retreat dazed. The ladies stood trembling like plantain trees that stand on the edge of a river that runs with swift and strong currents. The great chief assuring them that he would never give them up gently touched the heroine's bright and faultless forehead in order to wipe away her sweat. Prompted by fear and modesty, she attempted to move away but preventing that he clasped her to his breast. She looked like a peacock which drunk with the toddy that distilling from mango and jack fruits collects on rocks, staggers on the hill like a tired dancing girl.

The noble lord of high mountains divined the maiden's inmost thoughts and won her heart. Explaining to her the bliss of wedded life he told her that they would together entertain a number of guests serving them rice prepared with ghee and the blood of rams. He would consider it a boon to eat with her the food that may be left. Praising Lord Muruka, he assured the puzzled maid that he would marry her. She was convinced when he took sweet clear water and drank it. They enjoyed themselves like mating elephants. The wide rayed sun sank down and disappeared behind the hills. The deer took shelter under trees in crowds; herds of cows called out their calves; the nightingale from big palmyras sent out a call for its mate; the snake disgorged its gem; the āmpal tune played by herdsmen on sweet lutes could be heard here and there; the āmpal opened out its bright petal; the priests performed their religious rites; in wealthy homes bright bangled

women lighted their lamps; the jungle men living upon high lofts lit their fires; the clouds around the hills grew dark .

Soothing her grief, he told her that they would marry when her relations would give her hand to him performing public rites in the proper manner. Like a bull that pursues a cow after mating with it he went with the heroine and her companion and left them at the gates of the ancient town where drums sounded ceaselessly. And since then, he used to call on her at nights regularly. If watchmen were about when she reached her place, or angry dogs barked loudly, or the mother was awake, or the moon shone bright, he would miss her company. On such occasions, he would be disappointed but not vexed.

After narrating what happened in the past the heroine's confidante tells her mother that the chief was a worthy lover as he has not passed his prime and has not lost the virtues innate to his high station in life. The heroine has to be treated with pity and love because fearing wicked rumours in the town she feels that their secret meeting was ill advised. Her cool eyes are moist with tears and have lost their loveliness like the flowers attacked by the torrent of raindrops. Whenever she thinks of him, her eyelids droop. She is worried about her lover's nocturnal visits since he will have to escape animals like the tiger, yāli, the antelope, the elephant, the deadly lion with raging eyes, the snake that goes about in search of prey, the black and bent legged crocodile that lies in wait in the deep waters of the whirlpool, the alligator as well as the tangled creepers, the slippery ground, demons, pythons and panthers and all other ills.

Such an appeal by the confidante who seems to be well-versed in human psychology would have won the mother's approval of the heroine's deed and of her choice. This is the way the poet explains the grammar of love as advocated by the Tamils of his time. The lovers, worthy of each other, fall in love at first sight. Though there is nothing wrong with the courtship, the heroine's conscience pricks her since she has chosen her husband without getting the consent of her parents. Both the chief and the maid are anxious that the mutual love developed during the days of courtship should eventuate in a *karpu* wedding with the approval of her parents. It is stated in *Tolkāppiyam's Poruḷiyal* that the heroine's confidante would not disclose the secret courtship till the right moment and that this *arattoṭu nirral* manifests in seven modes: *eḷittal* (speaking of the hero's humble behaviour), *ēttal* (praising his greatness) *vēṭkai uraittal* (revealing the desire

of each for the other) kūrutaḷ ucātaḷ (deliberations on the condition of the heroine), ēṭiṭu (giving reasons for uniting them), talaippāṭu (occurrence of the chance meeting) uṇmai ceppum kiḷavi (speaking the truth). The poem is, of course, a locus classicus of what Tolkāppiyar defines as aṟattoṭu nirraḷ.

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10. BIRTH OF AN INDIAN EPIC: FROM CAṆKAM POEMS TO KUMARASAMBHAVAM

Kalidasa's *Kumārasambhavam* has been baffling the minds of Western and traditional Indian scholars for a long time with regard to its title, content, structure and texture. Considered one of the early works of the great Indian craftsman, it has seventeen parts (sargas) though Sanskrit critics aver that the larger part of it, from the ninth to the seventeenth book, is an interpolation as it is poetically inferior to the smaller first part of eight books, has not been quoted by later poets and has been totally ignored by many of the commentators. Almost every writer on the epic accepts that the first seven or eight sargas are vintage Kalidasa but not all of them are prepared to question the authenticity of the great bulk of the work, which is called *Kumārasambhavam* but speaks of the birth of Kumāra only in one of the later cantos. For the story of the epic, several sources such as Ramayana's "Bālakāṇṭam" (Sargas 36 & 37), *Mahabharata*'s "Vaṇaparvam" (Chapters 227-33), *Sivapurānam*'s "Gnanasamhita" (Chapters 5-16), *Sivamahapurānam*'s "Rudrasamhita" (Pārvati Kāṇṭam), *Skandapurānam*'s Kēdara Kāṇṭam (Chs 21-31 and Chs 35-36), *Matsya Purānam* (Ch-153), *Padma Purānam* (Chs 6-38), and *Linga Purānam* (Chs 101-02) have been suggested but as the native scholar K.Krishnamoorthy says, "Scholarship is unable to decide how much of this poem he (Kalidasa) owes to his sources and how much is his own creation" (47). According to the Western scholar, A.N. Keith also, we know nothing of Kalidasa's model for his poem, though "there are doubtless reminders here and there of Asvagosha, as in the description of the actions of the women of the city (viii 56 – 59) on the advent of Siva and Parvati which has a prototype in the description of the *Buddhacarita* (iii 13-24) of the entrance of the prince and which is taken up again in the description of the *Raghuvamśa* of the entry of Aja and Indumatī (vii 5-16)".

Kalidasa's date is another vexed question that has been debated endlessly though the celebrated historian of Sanskrit literature believes that Kalidasa "lived before A.D 472 and probably at a considerable distance, so that to

place him about A.D. 400 seems completely justified" (Keith 82). Our experts are, of course, extremely divided in their pronouncements and hunches and the period, in their opinion, ranges from the first century B.C to the fifth century A.D. But the Indian and Western scholars are surprisingly unanimous in their conviction that for some motifs, themes, and poetic forms, Kalidasa is ultimately indebted to the highly esteemed corpus of Caṅkam poems. As early as the seventies of the twentieth century, George L. Hart in his *The Poems of Ancient Tamil, their Milieu, and their Sanskrit Counterparts* and *The Relation Between Tamil and Classical Sanskrit* came out with striking examples of Kalidasa's direct or indirect borrowings from Caṅkam poets. His findings have been later corroborated by a few more of equal erudition.

One of most striking motifs common to ancient Tamil and Sanskrit poetry is the flute-like music of the wind emanating from bamboos. An exquisite description of this occurs in *Akanānūru* 225. Kalidasa uses it more than once:

The wind breathing through hollow bamboos makes sweet music

(Meghadūtam 58)

The Himalaya, filling the holes of bamboos

With the wind issuing from the cave-mouths

Assumed the role of the one that gave tana to Kinnaras

(Kumar 1:8)

The music flowing from the holes of bamboos

Filled with air and sounding like flutes.

(Raghuvamsam II:12)

There is no messenger motif in Sanskrit before Kalidasa, whose *Meghadutam* has an inspiring source in some Caṅkam pieces which, resorting to well-established conventions, use non-human creatures like cranes and crabs as messengers. An *Akanānūru* heroine sends a crab as a messenger to her lover.

O Crab, you are my only incomparable support because neither the grove, nor the salt-pond nor the sweet-smelling punnai haunted by the bees will convey my message. You must meet the one in whose land a swarm of bees fed on the honey from the neytal flowers of the big salt pond are too inebriated to fly and must tell him, "At the dead of night when the small crow of the sea-shore, perched on a branch of the *thāzhai*, feeling frustrated, dreams of eating prawns with its beloved

female companion, how can the lady that removed your misery overcome hers?

The motif of separation of lovers during the monsoon occurs first in the Indo-Aryan in *Satta-Sai*, one of whose poems reads

As I hear the thunder
It is like the executioner's drum.

In the Tamil Akam poem this is a common motif and in *Kuruntokai* also a heroine curses the unsympathetic thunder and lightning whose murderous appearance seems to threaten her life:

*Not knowing that I am one to be pitied
the black clouds still roar and rain
and send lightning, O friends, aiming
at my life.*

(*Kuruntokai* 216)

An interesting theme occurring in *Satta-Sai* and traceable to Caṅkam poetry is the *abhisarika* or the wanton woman braving the weather and going out in wintry darkness to meet her lover. One such heroine reprimands her lover:

*O ungrateful one! I still see
the village mud I went through
to get to you on rainy nights.*

In *Kumārasambhavam*, *abhisarikas*, who may be noble ladies in genuine love with heroic men, are said to find their way by the light provided by *Oshadi* (herbs) when they are intent upon their rendez-vous even on days of dark clouds (vi.43).

Siegfried Lienhard in his "Tamil Literature Conventions and Sanskrit Mukṭaka Poetry" demonstrates with telling examples how several *Kavisamayās* are of Tamil origin. Quoting approvingly these Western scholars, Krishnamoorthy explains that "Maharashtra and Vidarbha bordering Tamil Nadu must have acted as a bridge or carrier of Tamil poetic conventions directly into Mahārāṣṭri Prakṛit and through it into Classical Sanskrit" (13). But a close reading of *Kumārasambhavam* in the light of Caṅkam works will force us to conclude that it was not a case of indirect

influence through Maharastri Prakrit or even of a nodding acquaintance with ancient Tamil poetry but of a profound impact of some of the early as well as late Caṅkam writings though we may never know how this happened. *Tirumurukārruppatai* and *Paripāṭal* seem to have served as exemplary sources of inspiration for *Kumārasambhavam* for which there is no known Sanskrit model.

Kalidasa's love and admiration for Kumāra is unprecedented in Sanskrit literary tradition. Besides authoring an epic on his favourite god, he sings the lord's praise in numerous contexts in his other works reminding us of the tributes to Murukan in Caṅkam poems which present the Tamil deity as an archetype of beauty, youth and heroism.

Akanānūru alludes to

ciṇam miku murukan
pal porī maññai velkoṭi uyariya
oṭiya viḷaviṇ neṭiyōn (149: 15-6)

ceru miku cēey (266:20)

Poruṇarārruppatai speaks of

murukan cīrrattu urukeḷu kuricil (131)

and Puranānūru of

maṇi mayil uyariya mārā veṇṇip
piṇi muka ūrti voṇ ceyyōnum eṇa (56:7-8)

In all these classics, Murukan is presented as one who is wrathful, heroic, brilliant and ever victorious and has the peacock as his vehicle.

In *Meghadutam* in a single stanza, Kumāra's parentage, glory and achievement are put in a nutshell:

Skanda has made that hill his fixed abode;
Transform yourself into a flower-cloud
and shower him with blossoms
moist with Ganga's celestial waters;
for he is the blazing energy, sun-surpassing,
that the wearer of the crescent – moon placed
in the divine Fire's mouth to protect Indra's hosts. (St 45)

It is in *Raghuvamsam* that Kumāra becomes the standard of comparison

for almost every king of the Raghu dynasty just as Murukan is the model for the ancient Tamil kings and princes in Caṅkam poetry.

*As Parvati and the bull-bannered Sankara
were delighted to have Kumāra (one born
in the reeds).... so the king and the Magadha
princess were delighted to have the little
prince. (3:23)*

*Raghu, who resembled Kumāra in
valour, shot an arrow. (3:55)*

*His queen, they say, gave birth to a son
(Aja) who very nearly resembled
Kumāra. (5:36)*

*Seated on the bejeweled throne, he was
comparable in beauty to Guha riding
on the peacock's back. (6:4)*

*The king's prowess was equal to that of
Kumāra, who pierced the Krauncha mountain. (9:2)
Raghava... resembled the son of Hara. (11:83)*

*Being affectionate by nature, Rama treated all
the mothers with equal respect just as
the leader of the army of gods showed equal
love to the Krittikkas from whose breasts he had
sucked milk with his six mouths. (14:22)*

Even in *Vikramōrvasiyam*, Kalidasa cannot help recalling a scene from the thirteenth Canto of his first epic. The installation of Âyus as heir-apparent reminds Narada of the crowning of Mahasena or Kartikeya as the Commander-in-chief by Indra. Such repeated references to Skanda are indicative not only of Kalidasa's fondness for the young god but of the infectious nature of the great zeal with which Murukan had been portrayed in Caṅkam classics.

The extent of *Kumārasambhavam*, the appropriateness of its title and the authenticity of Cantos 9-17 have been fruitlessly discussed by the Sanskrit scholars without reference to the models available elsewhere. It has been pointed out that only a limited number of manuscripts at the Bhandarkar

Institute, Pune, contain the text upto the seventeenth sarga while many commentaries end with the seventh or eighth sarga. Commentators like Arunagirinatha and Narayana seem to consider the poem complete at the end of the eighth sarga and none of the rhetoricians quote a single verse from the later nine sargas. Those that swear that Kalidasa wrote only eight sargas leave a number of questions unanswered. Eight sargas are too few for a poem to be called a Mahakavya especially because *Raghuvamsam*, *Sisupālavadam*, *Naisadham*, *Kirātārjunīyam* and *Haravijaya* contain as many as 19, 20, 22, 18 and 50 sargas respectively. The story of the poem is far from complete at the end of the eighth sarga which describes the union of Siva and Parvati after a colourful wedding. Neither Kumāra's birth nor Tārakavadha has taken place. Sargas 9 and 10 alone describe the epic hero's extraordinary birth. The only reason given in favour of the argument that the later sargas are not by Kalidasa is that they are not worthy of the great poet. Critics are not wanting who have expressed doubts about the genuineness of even the eighth sarga which describes the joys of the wedded pair of divinities. But, as a native scholar like Karmarkar concludes after an impartial examination of all available evidence, "Sargas 1-8 are definitely from the pen of Kalidasa, sargas 9-10 also are most probably ascribed to him and that it is not improbable that sargas 11-17 have also been written by him" (xv). Very strangely, the title cannot be justified by either group because the birth of Kumāra is described in the tenth sarga and not in the eighth or in the seventeenth. If Kumārasambhava is taken to mean the birth of Kumāra neither position is tenable as the poet takes so long a time to describe the birth and goes far beyond it to recount the exploits of Skanda. As suggested by Jivananda, the only way out is to take "Sambhava" in the sense of both 'birth' and 'extraordinary greatness' so as to include the account of Karthikeya's birth and destruction of Taraka by him (xiii). This explanation helps us trace the probable source of the title. The fifth poem of *Paripāṭal* towards the end of its description of the birth of Murukan uses the remarkable phrase, "perumpeyar muruka" (5:50) as an apostrophe. Tirumurukāruppatai, a full-length poetic glorification of Murukan, also uses the same epithet besides "perumpeyar iyavul" (274) again immediately after a brief account of the god's strange birth. The ninth poem of *Paripāṭal* beginning with a brief mention of Murukan's birth calls him "viyattaku kumara" (9:82). It is this "perumpeyar" meaning 'great name' that has caught the attention of Kalidasa who wants to cherish it in his long epic of Kumara's birth and cosmic fame.

The old and modern Sanskrit scholars and critics, who shy away from

the eighth and later sargas because they picture Siva and Parvati as a pair that loves each other with a wild erotic joy, seem to be unaware of a particular literary tradition embodied in ancient *Partipāṭal* poems. Anandavardhana observes that there were critics who deemed it wrong to depict the amour of two deities and Keith, mentioning this, adds, “the subject is unquestionably a daring one, the events which bring about the marriage of the highest god Civa to Uma and the birth of Skanda, the war god” (Keith 87). But the ancient Tamils, being great aesthetes to whom poetry was not a pastime but a way of life, were never too squeamish to bring their gods into the realm of love poetry. The courtship of Murukan and Valli was constantly celebrated in numerous ways. But what is significant is that one of the legitimate themes of *Partipāṭal* is love fused with divinity. Pērācīriyar says,

Of the four Purusharthas, Dharma, Artha, Kāma, Moksha, this poetic genre will have kāma as its subject in its parts on the prayer to God and play on the hill side and in the spring.

In his commentary on a different *nūṛpa* (Tol.Akat.53), Naccinārkkīṇiyar also observes that in *Pāripāṭal*, concerned with the ways of the world, even the invocation to God will be about the subject of love. Yāpparuṅkalaviruttiyuṭaiyār clearly states that the association of love with deities in a *paripāṭal* is not a blemish.

teyvam kāmam

maiyl poruḷām paripāṭallē (Yāpparuṅkalaviruttiyuṭaiyār: 571)

In most of the extant *Partipāṭal* poems there is an intermingling of scenes of devotion to the Lord with scenes of love-making, very much like the statues in our temples depicting erotic scenes. The ninth poem by Kuṇṇampūtanār, paying a tribute to Tirupparankunram, one of the abodes of Murukan, dramatizes the fight for supremacy between Valli and Dēvasēna, the two wives of the Tamil god and even advocates the pleasures of clandestine love which is reported to be superior to wedded love.

It is said that there were thirty one poems on Murukan in the original *Partipāṭal* collection and a knowledge of one or two of them or of the genre itself would have emboldened the Sanskrit poet to bring together eroticism and divinity though he oversteps the limits in certain places, much to the great chagrin of some of the later generations of his

commentators. *Partipāṭal*, now recognized to be the first of religious poems written in any Indian language (Ramanujan: 253) gives the first Tamil version of the birth of Murukan, according to Kamil Zvelebil. And in this area also there is reason to conclude that *Paripāṭal* has had its impact on Kalidasa.

Now that everything seems to hinge on the date of *Partipāṭal* it may be proper and desirable to settle that question before we proceed further. *Tirumurukārruppaṭai*, *Kalittokai*, and *Partipāṭal* are generally considered to be late Caṅkam works while *Akanānūru*, *Kuruntokai* and *Narriṇai* are of an earlier period but not all *Partipāṭal* poems were written later than *Akanānūru*. Nallantuvan is the author of four *Partipāṭal* pieces including the eighth on Murukan in which he claims that since the Tirumurthis and numerous other devas have come to worship the deity of Tirupparankunram, it is comparable to the Himalayas and its spring to the famed Saravanappoykai, both reenacting the scene of Kumara's glorious birth. The poem ends with his moving tribute to the sacred hill:

*As the lovers that never part from each other
and the others that seek the blessings of
the son of the blue throated Lord
and the lady of spotless
character will venerate the temple, O hill,
may you retain the wealth of water in your
stream even when the whole earth
suffers from want of rain.* (8:125-20)

Nallantuvan and his love for the hilly abode of Murukan are mentioned in an *Akanānūru* poem by no less a poet than Maruthaniḷanākanār of Caṅkam-fame.

*cūr maruṅkarutta cuṭarilai neṭuvēl
cīrmiku murukan taṇparaṅ kunrattu
antuvan pāṭiya cantu keḷu neṭuvarai
intīm paiṇcuṇai.* (Akam 59)

This can be evidence enough for the particular *Paripāṭal* poem to be as old as any early Caṅkam poems.

That the story of Kumāra's birth as narrated by the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* could not have been a source of Kalidasa's version in

Kumārasambhavam is made clear by some Sanskrit scholars according to whom, “they differ so materially” (Karmarkar: 17). In the *Mahabharata*, *Vanaparvan* adhyayas 223-225, clearly state that Kumāra is the son of Agni. While wandering on the Manasa mountain, Indra, on the lookout for a leader of the army of gods, comes across a young lady crying out for help and drives away Kesi, who is chasing her with evil intentions. This maid happens to be Devasena, daughter of Daksa, who desperately seeks some one to marry her. Brahmadeva, approached by Indra on her behalf, declares that her husband will be the future General of the gods. Meanwhile, Agni lusts after the wives of the Saptarishi and his wife Svaha, assuming the forms of six of them, gratifies his desire. Kartikeya, a six-faced child, is born of Agni’s semen, and immediately after birth, pierces the Krauncha hill and destroys the Sveta mountain with arrows. The divine child brought up by Visvamitra, dares to fight with Indra but is finally reconciled with him. Indra appoints him Chief of the army of gods besides giving Dēvasēna in marriage to him. The *Anusāsanaparvan* and the *Salyaparvan* also speak of Karthikeya’s birth but in different ways. In the *Balakanda* of *Ramayana*, the mighty god is described as the son of Agni and the Ganges and called Agnisambhava.

Examining the various versions of the birth of Murukan, Kamil Zvelebil observes that the *Paripāṭal* version differs significantly from the northern versions.

The original Tamil Murukan was the son of Koravai, the mother goddess of war and victory... Later myth-makers, however, must find a father for Murugan. They do not accept Rudra or Agni as his father, although either one of these gods is the father of the Northern Skanda. Why? Because neither Rudra nor Agni are important and well-known gods in the Tamil Country. On the contrary, it is Siva, the great god, the god who emerged with the development of powerful feudal kingdoms in the South – the god-king of the Tamils – who is important in Tamilnadu. Hence the Tamil myth makers substitute Siva as the father of the composite Skanda-Murugan in the south. According to Sanskrit sources, Skanda was not born of any mother. (Zvelebil 8-9)

So far the as the parentage of Skanda is concerned, Kalidasa's account is closer to the Tamil versions than to the Sanskrit ones. There is a brief reference to the circumstances of Murukan's birth followed by his varied achievements in *Tirumurukārruppatai*.

neṭum peruñcimaiyattu nīlappaiñcunai
aivaruḷ oruvan aṅkai ērpa
aruvar payanta āramar celva. (253-55)

The six – faced deity born of the six ladies in the blue stream of Himalayas the great, received by the hand of one of the five gods, ie, Agni.

In a well-known passage, the fifth poem of *Paripāṭal* gives a more detailed account of Murukan's birth:

Siva refrained from sexual union with Uma
and because of the boon granted to Indra, keeping
his promise to the latter, cut the foetus into pieces
with his fiery axe, much to the horror of the seven
worlds. The seven rishis, as a result of
their Samadhi, comprehending the identity of
the embryo, desired to take care of it so that
their wives could give it birth but being concerned
with the reputation of their wives threw the parts
into the threefold sacrificial fire uttering
"Let him bear himself!" The six
women, Cālīni excepted, ate the offering
and delivered themselves of six children
in a pond in the Himalayas. When attacked by
Indra's Vajra, the six bodies got united into
a single child with six faces and twelve hands. (26-54)

Kalidasa's version is not faithful to any one puranic or literary account but resembles the Tamil version inasmuch as it underlines the role of Siva and Parvati in the miraculous coming into being of Skanda. When Siva prolongs his dalliance with his newly wedded wife for centuries, Agni approaches him, first in the shape of a dove, then in his own person, begging his aid for the birth of a hero that will destroy Taraka. As Siva with six faces looks at Parvati with intense carnal desire, his six forehead-eyes emit tejas, bright as a crore of suns. Agni accepts the semen into his mouth and from the seed of Siva thrown into the Ganges and shared by the

six Krittikas, Pleiades, Kumara is born in six distinct shapes, which when embraced by Parvati, grow into a single child with two legs, six faces and twelve shoulders. The poet waxes eloquent over Parvati's love for her child in more than one canto in *Kumārasambhavam* and goes back to it with equal zeal in his *Raghuvamsam* also. In *Kumārasambhavam*, Parvati almost becomes an ideal human mother to the child that is called Kangeya, Saravana Bhava, Karthikeya and Skanda and brought up in Kailasa. Lord Siva is portrayed as a proud father who tells his wife how their child will perform several heroic deeds such as imprisoning Brahma himself and wiping out the dreadful asuras. In more than one place in *Raghuvamsam*, the love of the divine pair for the divine child is described in human terms stressing the physical relationship.

*The dēvadāru tree that you see there has
been adopted as a son by the bull-bannered
god and has become capable of appreciating
the flavour of Skanda's mother's milk
flowing out of her breasts.* (2:36)

*The bark of this tree was once peeled off
by a wild elephant and on that account
the daughter of the Himalayas bemoaned it
just as she would grieve for Skanda
wounded by the missiles of demons.* (2:37)

In addition to *Tirumurukārruppatai*, a hymn in praise of Murukan and the eight *Paripātal* poems devoted to the Tamil god, the earliest works *Akanānūru*, *Puranānūru*, *Narriṇai*, *Kalittokai*, *Ainkurunūru*, *Maturaikkāñci*, *Kuriñcippāṭṭu*, *Kuruntokai*, *Patirruppattu*, *Paṭṭinappālai*, *Perumpānārruppatai* and *Malaipaṭukaṭām*, all abounding in tributes to the divine symbol of beauty and heroism, must have had a deep impact on Kalidasa and urged him on to compose an epic on Skanda, who had become a much favoured national deity. It is more for some literary features than for the Tamil version of the story of Murukan's birth and achievement that he is indebted to *Paripātal* and *Tirumurukārruppatai*. He has conceived *Kumārasambhavam* not as an epical narration of the birth, life and deeds of a single hero but as a series of dramatically effective scenes modeled upon the ones in the two Tamil Poems.

The masterpiece of Nakkīrar, divided into six parts devoted to the six war-camps of the leader of the army of gods, consists of a few idyllic, evocative scenes indicative of the glory of Murukan and hence dear to the

heart of his devotee. In the first part, Murukan's appearance and Tirupparaṅkunram's scenic beauty, and the dance and deeds of the divine damsels who worship the god gain prominence. The use of the six faces and twelve hands by the benevolent lord to protect the good and to punish the wicked becomes the burden of the second part. In the next, we witness a long procession of bhaktas including the big three and numerous devas and saints who have come to pay homage to the lord of Āvināṅkuṭi. The way the duty-bound *Andhaṇar* worship him and the rituals they perform find a succinct description in the section on Ērakam. The penultimate part of the poem contains a prayer in the form of a panegyric celebrating the birth and supremacy of Murukan whose background and multifarious activities are expressed in exquisite apostrophes like "aruvar payanta āramar celva, ālkelu kaṭavuṭ putalva, malai makaḷ makanē, mārrōr kūrrē, korravai ciruva, paḷaiyōḷ kuḷavi, tānaittalaiva, nūlaṛi pulava, pulavar ērē and kuricil." The poem ends with a picturesque description of a cascade flowing down the rocky hillside of Pazhamutircholai, the sixth abode of Murukan.

Almost every *Paripāṭal* poem on Murukan, combining the themes of divinity and love, consists in a few fascinating vignettes of the grandeur of a Murukan temple and of love in union or lovers sulking. In the eighth poem, for instance, a brief scene of the procession of gods and saints at the shrine in Tirupparaṅkunram is followed by a longer dramatic representation of the quarrel and reconciliation between a pair of lovers in which the heroine's female friend plays an important role eventuating in their final agreement to worship Murukan together. Immediately after an exciting plea by the poet himself for the acceptance of the superiority of furtive love over wedded love in the ninth poem, there is a scintillating mock-heroic account of the fight between the two wives of Murukan, Valli and Devasena, supported by their attendants. When scenes of sensuous love can form an integral part of the reverential address to Murukan, why should humour be precluded? The nineteenth piece begins with a description of the pilgrimage undertaken to Tirupparaṅkunram by the populace of Maturai led by the king and his women, depicts the paintings of some puranic episodes in some halls of the temple, passes on to two humorous scenes revealing the innocence of a bevy of girls and ends with a tribute to Murukan coupled with an invocation. The author of the nineteenth poem, invoking the Lord at Tirupparaṅkunram, expresses his desire to be born again in the same temple town but goes on to describe the amorous deeds of a few love-tormented women bathing in the mountain spring.

Kalidasa, being the laureate of the Sringāra rasa, love-in-union as well as love- in-separation, the two dominant themes of Tamil Akam poetry, revels in *Sambogasringāra* in the eighth canto of *Kumārasambhavam* after having touched the peaks of *vipralambasringāra* in more than one context in the first seven cantos. His main interest lies not in a breathtaking recital of the events associated with Kumāra's incarnation but in lingering over certain scenes of great aesthetic appeal and dramatizing them through sparkling dialogues. Avoiding the Homeric model of rapid narration of the story and not following the examples of Valmiki or Vyasa who give equal importance to events and characters, Kalidasa, like the Caṅkam poets, focuses his attention on one or two or three aesthetically appealing dramatic scenes in every one of his sargas, and the story, as has been noticed by Sanskrit scholars, often "fades into insignificance" (Karmarkar: xviii). The grandeur and majesty of the mountain Himalayas and the extraordinary beauty of the flawless Uma are of absorbing interest to the poet as well as to the reader in the first book. One of the seventeen verses describing the Himalayas mentions the hunters haunting the hilly region in search of animals.

*Even though the blood-drops shed by the elephants
killed by lions have been washed off by the flood
of melting snow, the hunters are able to identify
the track of the lions by the pearls that have
fallen from the interstices of their claws. (1:6).*

Many Caṅkam poems give astonishingly realistic accounts of the appearance of the Himalaya even though it was a far-off place to their authors. The belief that the elephant's tusk contains pearls is mentioned in a few of them.

*Muttuṭai maruppin (Patirruppattu 32:3)
yāṇai muttār maruppin (Kuriṇjippattu: 35-6)
yāṇai muttuṭai (Malaipatuṇṭai 517-8)
muttuṭai vāṅkōṭu (Tirumurukāṇṟuppaṭai)
mukaivaḷar cāntural muttār maruppin. (Kalittokai 40:45)*

It is surprising to note that an Akanānūru poem, very much like Kalidasa's verse, brings the mountain, the hunter and pearls in the elephant's tusk together. The hero's land is so rich that a hunter descending from the top of the land's hill is able to collect gold, precious stones and pearls that fall out of the broken tusks of elephants.

perumalaiccilampiṇ vēṭṭam pokiya

—
vērkaik kaṇṇiyan ilitaru nāṭarku (Akanānūru 282:1-10)

In a later canto of *Kumārasambhavam*, one of the seven great rishis tells Himavan, “If you don’t bear this world with its nether regions, how can the great snake, Adhishesha, do it with its soft, lotus-like heads?” (*Kumārasambhavam*, 6:80). The ninth *Paripāṭal* opens with a reference to the belief that the great Himalaya in the north sees to it that the world is borne without getting shaken.

irunilam tuḷaṅkāmai vaṭa vayinivantōṅki (Paripāṭal 9:1)

Using this belief, a *Puṇanānūru* poem praises the philanthropist Āy in glowing terms:

*The world would have turned upside down
if it had not been protected by Āy in the south
and by the Himalayas in the north where a yak
together with its female companion takes shelter under a shady tree.*

Narantai narumpul mēynta kavari

—
pīralātu maṇṇo immalar talai ulakē (Purananuru 132: 4-9)

The yak scene of the *Puṇanānūru* poem reminds us of Kalidasa’s portrayal of the charming animal that is known to live mainly in the Himalaya mountain and in Tibet.

*The fact that Himavan is the king of the mountain
seems to be acknowledged by the presence of yaks
whose tails white as the lunar rays moving this side
and that serve as royal fans. (Kumārasambhavam 1:13)*

It is in the second part of the first book that Kalidasa’s description of Parvati’s appearance beginning with the foot and ending with the head in nineteen verses stands out arresting the reader’s attention. Sanskrit scholars tell us that this description of feminine beauty, limb by limb, adding up to a perfect whole became a regular literary convention in later literature and that it is given the name *nakhasikhāntavarṇanā*” (Krishnamoorthy:48). In Tamil, this motif is to be found not only in *Tirumurukārruppatai* but in earlier writings like *Porunārārruppatai* and *Cirupāṇārruppatai*. The three Tamil works confer this honour of head-to-foot description on the divine

damsels (Cūrara makalir), the singing woman (pāṭini) and the dancing woman (viṛali) respectively and there are striking similarities among the four versions. Kalidasa uses plantains and elephant's trunks as negative similes in the description of Parvati's thighs saying that the latter are not so cold as plantains or so rough as elephant's trunks. *Cirupāṇārruppaṭai* uses the same double simile in its description of the professional dancing woman.

Cērnṭuṭan cerinta kuṛankil kuṛankeṇa

Mālvarai olukiya vālāi (Cirupāṇārruppaṭai 19-21)

Parvati's breasts pressing against each other are so close that there is no space for a lotus-thread between them. (*Kumārasambhavam* 1:40)

The professional singer of *Porunarārruppaṭai* is endowed with a pair of young rising breasts that cannot be divided even by the thinnest twig.

īrkku Iṭaipōkā ēr ilavaṇa mulai

(Porunarārruppaṭai: 36)

Of Parvati's slender neck and the pearl-necklace round it, we don't know which made the other beautiful. (*Kumārasambhavam*:42)

In *Kalittokai*, we come across women whose beauty beautifies the ornaments they wear.

Kalampūṭta aṇiyavar kārikai maṇi ceyya. (Kalittokai 27:11)

In the second canto of Kalidasa's epic, the dialogue between Brahmadeva and the denizens of heaven tortured by Tāraka lures the reader as it is tinged with mild irony and genial humour. The catalogue and procession of the gods that meet the heavenly Creator would remind any close student of Caṅkam poetry of a similar expedition undertaken by the devas in *Tirumurukārruppaṭai*. The procession in *Kumārasambhavam* is led by Indra, the edges of whose thunderbolt appear to have been blunted on account of his fear for the merciless asura. The all-powerful noose in the hand of Varuna is now like a serpent whose strength and venom have been destroyed by a charm. The hand of Kubera that has been deprived of its mace is like a tree with broken branches. The sturdy rod of Yama, with which he is now scratching on the ground, losing its luster, seems to have become as small as an extinguished fire-brand. The twelve Ādityas having lost their heat can be gazed at as though they were figures depicted in pictures. The worry, agitating the minds of the seven wind-gods, the Maruths,

has reduced their speed just as flood may be stopped by the contrary motion of water. The eleven Rudras, their crescent moons on their matted hair hanging down, look crest-fallen (2:20-26).

In *Tirumurukārruppatai*, the procession to the Murukan temple at Āvinankuṭi is led by saints who are joined by Tirumāl, Uruttiran, Indiran and the eighteen types of devas including the twelve Ādityas, the twelve Rudras, the Vasus and the Maruts all of whom shine as stars, rush as the wind and possess the strength of fire and the voice of thunder.

mīṇ pūttanṇa tōṇṇalar mīncēṇṇu
Valikilarntanṇa celavinar
Urumiṭittanṇa kuralinar (161-172).

The saints wearing bark-garments have silvery white hair, their half-starved bodies are pure and clean; their bony chests are covered with the deer-skin. In their learning and possession of a keen intellect, they are exemplary. Free from anger, misery and bitterness, they are gentle and extremely refined (126-137). There are echoes of this description in the sixth canto of *Kumārasambhavam* where the meeting of the famed seven saints and Siva takes place before they are sent as messengers to Himavan by the Lord seeking the hand of Uma in marriage. With their matted hair shining like gold, they look as bright as the numerous reflections of the sun in the waters of a river (6:47-50). They are as fast as the mind and travel in the sky blue as steel (6:36). *Akanānūru* and *Paripāṭal* also speak of the steel-coloured lightning.

Vēlinum pallūḷ miṇṇi (*Akanānūru* 175:12-13)
Kaṇṇōḷir ehkil kaṭiya miṇṇi (*Paripāṭal* 22:4)

The meeting between Indra and Kāma, the untimely appearance of spring and scenes of vernal beauty are the most enticing parts of the third book of the Sanskrit epic. It is here that we come across some of the motifs commonly found in *Paripāṭal* and *Kalittokai* such as the hero falling at the feet of the heroine begging for her forgiveness as well as scenes describing the love displayed for each other by pairs of bees, antelopes and elephants (*Kumārasambhavam* 3:36-37). But the most striking verse in this canto mentions the command of Kāma:

The male cuckoo, in its voice that has become
sweet because of its eating mango-sprouts, appeared
to announce the command of Madana skilled in
destroying the pride of women (3:32).

There is a similar passage in *Raghuvamsam* where the command to the sulking ladies is explicitly stated: “Overcome your wrath; leave your quarrel with your husband: if the season is gone, you won’t get it back; don’t be separated from your loved one” (9:47).

This is exactly the same as a passage found in *Cilappatikāram*, where also *Vacantam* is imagined as a friend of *Kāma*:

Maṇṇaṇ māraṇ maḱiḷ tuṇaiyākiya
Inṇiḷa vēṇil vantaṇaṇ

—
koṭimiṭai cōlaikkuyilōṇ eṇṇuṇ
paṭaiyuḷ paṭuvōṇ paṇimoḷi kūra (6-13)

ūṭiṇṭirellām uruvilāntaṇ āṇai
kūṭumiṇ eṇṇu kuyil cārṇa (8:123-24)

Even before Iḷaṅko, the Kuyil’s advice to the lovers at the advent of the spring season to be sane enough and not to miss the joy of the union with the loved one finds poetic expression in early and late Caṅkam works.

Puṇarntīr puṇarminō veṇa

—
iṇpa vēṇilum (*Narriṇai* 224: 4-5)
pūṇkaṇ iruṇikuyil akaraḷ ōmpumiṇ (*Narriṇai* 243:4)
kūṭip puṇarntīr piriyaṇ miṇ

—
Vēṇil viruntetir koṇṭu (*Kalittokai* 92: 61-68)

Such instances of Kalidasa’s borrowings from Caṅkam Classics can be multiplied *ad infinitum*. However, all this doesn’t mean that he was a slavish imitator of his Tamil ancestors. Caṅkam poets also freely and openly borrowed from one another. But it should be said to the credit of the Indian poets of the past that they did not suffer from what Harold Bloom calls the anxiety of influence. They never tried to suppress the evidence of their borrowings but at times even openly acknowledged their indebtedness. The literary tradition they cherished permitted this and they had the courage and the confidence to make what they borrowed their own by improving upon it or by adding something of their own individual identity. There is the unmistakable stamp of Kalidasa’s personality on most of what he has taken from his poetic forefathers writing in Tamil, Sanskrit or Prakrit. The greatness of the short and long poems of the Caṅkam period could be

easily recognized by him and he had the genius to forge a full-fledged, typically Kalidasian epic out of them. *Kumārasambhavam* is a supreme example of his success in this attempt.

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11. NALLANTUVANĀR'S HOROSCOPE: THE DATE OF *PARIPĀṬAL*

Paripāṭal, one of the celebrated eight anthologies of the Caṅkam period contains twenty four poems and a few fragments in a meter called *Paripāṭal*, the length of each poem varying from 32 to 140 lines. The pieces on Murukaṇ and Tirumāl are considered to be “the earliest bhakti poems in India, the earliest religious poems in a mother tongue” (Ramanujan 310). It is also widely believed that *Kalittokai* and *Paripāṭal* are the latest of the eight anthologies while *Kuruntokai* and *Puranānūru* include the earliest poems. But the date of *Paripāṭal* has proved to be as elusive as that of any of the Caṅkam works.

Contending that *Paripāṭal* belongs to the post-Caṅkam period, Vaiyapuripillai lists the following arguments in favour of his decision:

1. None of the poets of the *Paripāṭal* songs appear to have authored any of the poems in the other anthologies. Nallantuvaṇār of *Paripāṭal* is different from Antuvaṇār and Maturai Ācīriyaṇ Nallantuvaṇār. The author of the fifteenth *Paripāṭal*, Ḵamperuvalūtiyār is not the same as Kaṭaḷulmāyṇta Ḵamperuvalūti, to whom the hundred and eighty second poem of *Puranānūru* is attributed because the latter, using the word “Ītirar” in plural, must have been a Jain.
2. The number of Sanskrit words and of mythological allusions is much more in *Paripāṭal* than in the other works.
3. There are references to the Vaishnavite temples in Tiruvēṅkaṭam, Tiruvaraṅkam, Tirumāliruṅcōlai malai and Tiruvanantapuram only during the post-Caṅkam period when Ālvārs sang them. *Cilappatikāram* also alludes to them. Since the hill of Tirumāliruṅcōlai is mentioned in *Paripāṭal*, the work may belong to 600 A.D.
4. Campantar, who lived in the seventh century A.D., has sung Siva, the deity of Tirupparaṅkuṇṇam but not Murukaṇ. This

should lead us to conclude that the Murukan temple was erected later than Campantar's time. The poems in *Paripāṭal* on the Murukan of this shrine must have been written after the seventh century.

5. In the Tamil literary writings prior to the third century A.D., there is no reference to Agasthya whereas in *Paripāṭal* he is called "Potiyil munivan".
6. Maturai came to be known as Nānmāṭakkūṭal during the reign of Abiseka pandiyan in the third or fourth century A.D. The *Paripāṭal* that praises kūṭal might belong to that period.
7. Cāmikkaṇṇuppillai, examining the references to the planetary positions in the eleventh *Paripāṭal*, has stated that the year of that song is 634 A.D.
8. Words of later formation such as Nāṇ, āmām are to be found in the *Paripāṭal* songs.

All the contentions of Vaiyapurippillai are convincingly refuted by M.Rācamāṇikkanār in his *Tamiḷ moli-Ilakkiya Varalāru*.

1. Kaṇṇakanār, one of those that composed the music of *Paripāṭal* songs, is not different from the one to whom the two hundred and eighteenth poem of *Puranānūru* and seventy ninth poem of *Narriṇai* are attributed. A poet called Naṇṇākanār has written the three hundred and eighty first poem of *Puranānūru*. There is nothing against deciding that he is the same as the Naṇṇākanār who is reported to have composed the music for Kīrantaiyār's *Paripāṭal* poem.
2. In other anthologies also we do come across Sanskrit names like Uruttiran and Ulōccanār and puranic and mythological stories. Since many of the *Paripāṭal* poems are on Tirumāl and Murukan, there are in them plenty of Sanskrit words and allusions to Sanskrit puranas.
3. *Cilappatikāram* belongs to the first half of the second century A.D., the period of Kayavāhu. In that work, Vēnkaṭam, *Tiruvaraṅkam*, and Aḷakarmalai are reported to belong to Tirumāl. From *Perumpāṇārruppaṭai* (Ll 372-3), we learn that there was a temple for Tirumāl in Kāñci.
4. Just because Campantar has not sung the Murukan of Tirupparankuṇṇam, we cannot conclude that there was no shrine for Murukan there during those days. The fifty ninth poem of

Akanānūru pays a tribute to that deity and that is evidence enough for the existence of the temple during the Caṅkam days.

5. Vaiyapurippillai's claim that there was no reference to Agasthya in Tamil literary writings prior to 300 A.D. is also a mistake. In *Maturaikkāñci*, the legendary figure is praised as the ancient deity that sent Ravana away from Tamilnadu and Naccinārkkīṇiyar observes that it was Agasthya who did it. In the eighth Canto of *Cilappatikāram*, written in the second century A.D., the phrase 'potiyin muṇi' also alludes to the same saint.
6. Maturai is called "māṭam piṇṇkiya malipukaḷk kūṭal" in *Maturaikkāñci* (l 429) and nāṇmāṭakkūṭal in *Kalittokai* (l. 92).
7. P.T. Srinivasa Ayyangar has convincingly rejected the conclusion of Camikkannupillai on the basis of the passage about planetary positions that *Paripāṭal* was written in 634 A.D.
8. Since many of the songs of worship in *Paripāṭal* were meant for common people, words found in the spoken form of Tamil such as nāṇ and āmām might have been used in the poems.

Firmly concluding that *Paripāṭal* belongs to the Caṅkam period, *Rācamāṇikkanār* states that the Caṅkam period covers a large segment of time and that during that era *Tolkāppiyam* was written in the fourth century B.C., some of the *Pattuppāṭṭu* and *Eṭṭuttokai* anthologies before that time and the rest after that, *Kalittokai*, *Paripāṭal*, *Cilappatikāram*, and *Maṇimēkalai* making their appearance in the second or third century A.D.

The eleventh poem of *Paripāṭal* by Nallantuvaṇār describes the positions of the planets on the day when Vaiyai was in flood in the following words:

Virikatir matiyamoṭu viyalvicumpu puṇarppa
 ericātai eḷilvēlam talaiyeṇak Kīliruntu
 teruviṭaippaṭutta mūṇruoṇ patirrukkaiyul
 urukeḷu veḷlivantu ēṇriyal cēra
 varuṭaiyaip paṭimakan vāyppap poruḷteri
 punti mitunam poruntap pularviṭiyal
 aṅki uyar nirpa antaṇaṇ paṅkuviṇ
 illat tuṇaikkup pāleyta iraiyamaṇ
 villir kaṭaimakaram mēvap pāmpu ollai
 matiyam maṇaiya varunāḷil vāynta
 potiyin muṇivaṇ puraivaraik kīri

mituṇam aṭaiya virikatiṟ vēṇil
 etirvaravu māri iyaikaveṇa ivvārrāl
 puraikeḷu caiyam poḷimalai tāḷa
 neritarūm vaiyaippuṇal (1-15)

These astrological references have been interpreted by scholars in different ways. In his *History of the Tamils*, P.T. Srinivasa Ayyangar states that the attempt to decide the date of *Paripāṭal* on the basis of where the planets were on a day of lunar eclipse as described in a *Paripāṭal* poem has ended in failure because the details given in the poem are inadequate to fix the day beyond any doubt and that the information provided by the commentator while interpreting the poem has added to the confusion. But just because we are not able to clearly understand what Nallantuvanār and Parimēlaḷakar have written, we should not reject the passage as something completely fictional or as incomplete. The Caṅkam poets are known to have had a remarkable knowledge about the universe, comparable only to their knowledge of mankind and nature. Bharati is not indulging in empty rhetoric when he sings,

Hail to the gifted language that has measured
 the sky and will measure everything!
 Hail to the growing language that has known
 the sky and will know everything!

In a treatise called *An Indian Ephemeris*, making certain changes in the *Paripāṭal* passage, Cāmikkaṇṇuppillai concludes that the time referred to is 634 A.D. This was acceptable only to Vaiyapurippillai. On the other hand, another scholar, Tiruvārūr Cōmacuntara Tēcikar, closely examining the passage, argues that the day indicated is “Kali 2941 Pīramāti Āṇṭu Āvaṇittinḱaḷ 12 Thursday” ie, 161 B.C. Cōmacuntaranār, in the preface to his edition of *Paripāṭal*, observes that this conclusion has been accepted by many.

François Gros has discussed at length the question of the date of *Paripāṭal* in his introduction to *Le Paripāṭal, Texte tamoul*:

1. Having oscillated between 634 A.D. and 17 A.D., Cāmikkaṇṇuppillai decided in favour of 17 June 634 A.D. The simple and pure rejection of this date by literary historians other than Vaiyapurippillai cannot be called refutation.
2. K.G. Sankar is the only one who first proposed 254 A.D. and later

came to 27 July 17 A.D., another probable date finally excluded. But then he should renounce giving an account of the positions of Venus and Mercury and accept that the Hindus did not know to calculate them exactly.

3. One hesitates to accept the conclusions of Cāmikkaṇṇuppillai for various reasons of equal importance. The dating of a horoscope should explain all the elements involved. In the course of the controversy, this fundamental notion has been lost sight of and many authors are satisfied with partial solutions. Cāmikkaṇṇuppillai leaves room for doubt on three points of detail: (i) Taking ‘Aṅki uyar nirpa’ (lit fire stands high up) to mean that ‘the Pleiades are in culmination,’ Parimēlaḷakar deduces from it that the sun reaches the sign of Leo. At first sight, this deduction is irreproachable. But for Cāmikkaṇṇuppillai, on 17 June 634 A.D., the sun should be in cancer. Then he should have challenged Parimēlaḷakar’s interpretation of ‘uyar nirpa’ as ‘at the zenith’. But as it is, Cāmikkaṇṇuppillai’s conclusion does not accord with this detail. (ii) The exact place of the sun on that day is disputable. It is in Sagittarius on the day surmised by Cāmikkaṇṇuppillai. The expression, “yaman irai villiṇ Kaṭai makaram mēva” permits two readings: Saturn rejoins Capricorn, its dwelling. The suitability of the date suggested, ie, 643 A.D., depends on the acceptance of one or the other of the two versions. The problem relating to the date, therefore, cannot be solved easily because it is less a question of astronomy than an interpretation of the text. (iii) The two lines “potiyiṇ munivaṇ puraivaraikkīri mituṇam aṭaiya” are usually interpreted as an allusion to Agasthya, the Canopus star, which was certainly invisible at Maturai during the eclipse of 643 A.D. Although there are reasons to think that the mention of Agasthya here has no relevance, one could agree with K.G. Sankar that what is given in the text should also be taken into consideration and that Cāmikkaṇṇuppillai has failed on this point.
4. The second basic objection to the erudite efforts of Camikkaṇṇuppilai is that the very horoscope can be fictitious. If Parimēlaḷakar’s interpretation of the passage that all the planets are in their proper dwellings and that the day was the full moon day of *Avaniyarviam* is right, the poet’s account is fictitious and the eclipse of the moon imaginary... *Avaniyavittam* refers not only to the day of the renewal of the brahmanical thread but to a famous festival at

Maturai already forgotten during the time of the commentary of *Iraiyanar Akapporuḷ*, which has conserved it in our memory.

5. Unfortunately, the problem cannot be solved so simply in the negative. It was in fact easy for a poet as familiar as ours with astronomy to cast a fictitious horoscope more or less in the same terms but placing Mercury in Virgo and Venus in Libra, which, keeping the Sun in Leo, will not raise the problem of impossible theory which the precedent version will raise because of the elongation of maxima and minima of two inferior planets. Why is it that the poet has not thought of it? But who tells us, if not Parimēlaḷakar, that the sun is in Leo? If we place it, with Cāmikkaṇṇuppillai, in Cancer, then the truly extraordinary date of the real horoscope of 634 A.D. is the one mentioned by him.
6. There is another part of the poem with astronomical references to which no one has paid any attention. The second section of the poem also opens with certain astronomical data.

Paṇipaṭu paital viṭutalaip paruvattu
 ñāyiru kāyā naḷimārippirkuḷattu
 māyirun tiṅkaḷ maruniṇrai ātirai (75-77)

To mark the beginning of the month of *Tai*, the author evokes the full moon in Ādrā at the time when the sun is in Sagittarius. That was effectively the position of stars on Saturday 10 December 634 A.D.! But the phenomenon is periodic. On the other hand, at the level of literary beauty, if it is accepted that the poet, familiar with the astronomy of his time, looks at the sky for a harmony which responds to his song, one can notice that in the first part, on the date of 634 A.D., the sun is at the beginning of cancer and the moon at the end of Sagittarius, and in the second part their positions are reversed. This symmetry enters the structure of the poem and the movement of stars is nothing but an illusion of our imagination or the key to a poem written by a great astronomer.

7. All the efforts to fix the date of *Paripāṭal* on the basis of the planetary positions on the day Vaiyai was flooded have been in vain. If we accept this date as 17 June 634 A.D., then there is no other solution than to place Nallantuvanār in the middle of the seventh century. We have to accept it or else renounce all our efforts to show the unity of Caṅkam and to separate the two anthologies *Kalittokai* and *Paripāṭal* from the six others or else

come down as a whole to several centuries and conclude that the flowering of Caṅkam is posterior to the fifth century A.D. But such a solution is not acceptable to many. That is why the horoscope of *Paripāṭal* has been held at a distance of most of the discussion on the chronology or, on the contrary, interpreted as convenient to a date which is more in accordance with the traditional sentiment (François Gros XX-XIV).

To François Gros, the passage in *Paripāṭal* continues to be an enigma. In his history of Tamil literature, Zvelebil assigns *Paripāṭal* to a period from the second half of the fourth century A.D. to the first half of the sixth century A.D. on the ground that its language and its references to puranas and temples distance it from the rest of the Caṅkam corpus. He accepts that the presence of many Sanskrit words is due to its subject matter but adds that there are Sanskrit words in those sections in *Paripāṭal* which are not religious. Rejecting Vaiyapurippillai's position, Zvelebil concludes that the author of the forty third poem of *Akanānūru* and the *Kalittokai* poem is the same Nallanturvanār as the author of the *Paripāṭal* poem as well as the one who is praised in *Akanānūru* 59 by Marutaṇḷanākanār. Zvelebil also feels that, as suggested by François Gros, the poem cited by Pēraciriyar and Naccinārkiṇiyar in the commentary on the 152^d nūṟpa of the Ceyyūḷiyal of *Tolkāppiyam* is one of *Paripāṭal*. In a footnote, he observes that the date, 15 Āṭi 372 A.D., recommended by an article in *Centamil* is acceptable to him.

Since Cāmiḱkaṇṇuppillai had a very poor opinion about the ancient Indians' knowledge of astronomy and Vaiyapurippillai was always tempted to date the Tamil classics as far back as possible, it is good to consider the positions of those that were free from such prejudices and preconceived notions.

In his article "Ancient Heritage of Tamils" G.Ramachandran states that the controversial passage in *Paripāṭal* clearly describes the positions of the Rāhu and the moon on the full-moon night and that Cāmiḱkaṇṇuppillai has committed a blunder in assuming that the sun was in Leo on that day. When Mercury and Venus were in their houses the sun could not have been in Leo. But the poem does not say so. In the expression "Aṅki uyar nūṟpa" Aṅki does not refer to Kārttikai but to Aṅkāraṇ which is Mars. If interpreted like this, the date mentioned is Wednesday 25 June 540 B.C., on which the full moon was eclipsed by Rahu a little before the

sunrise and all the stars, as indicated in the poem, were in their own dwellings (Ramachandran 58-59).

The challenge thrown by Ramachandran has not been met by scholars well-versed in astronomy and literature. The date suggested by Cāmikkaṇṇuppillai and approved by Vaiyapurippillai is too late for any of the early or late Caṅkam works. Vātāpi was burnt by Parañcōtiyar, a contemporary of Appar and Campantar, in 642 A.D. This is a historical event that took place on a known date. Those who are familiar with the language of Tamil poetry down the ages know that the Caṅkam poems must have preceded the Tēvāram hymns by a considerable number of centuries. It has now been accepted by literary historians that the Bhakti movement started in the Tamil land and spread to the rest of the country and that *Paripāṭal* is the first of the Bhakti poems written in any Indian language. There are echoes of the *Paripāṭal* songs in the poems of Ālvārs and Nāyanmārs.

In fire, you are the heat.

In flowers, you are the scent.

Among stones, you are the diamond.

In words, you are truth.

Among virtues, you are the strength.

In the Vedas, you are the secret.

Of the elements, you are the first.

In the scorching sun, you're the light.

In the moonlight, you are the softness.

Everything, you are everything,

the sense, the substance, of everything.

Paripāṭal 3, Ll 63-68

Tr. A.K. RAMANUJAN

Ramanujan feels that in such poems on Tirumāl and Murugaṇ, older Sanskrit and Tamil motifs and themes meet and change each other. In this piece Tirumāl is portrayed as the essence of all objects. In the fourth poem of *Paripāṭal*, Tirumāl is glorified as the one from whom all things spring and to whom they go back again.

your heat and radiance are in the sun;
 your coolness and brightness are in the moon;
 your pouring and bounty are in the rain;
 your concern and forbearance are in the earth;
 your fragrance and beauty are in the earth;

your mien and expanse are in the water;
 your shape and sound are in the sky;
 your speed and restraint are in the wind;
 you therefore, protect by being in this, that, that-in-between
 and in the rest and away from them (Ll. 25-35)

Nammālvār was captivated not only by the idea of the poem but by its words also. The phrase in the *Paripāṭal* poem, “ivvum uvvum avvum pīravum ēmamārnta nīrpirintu” becomes

ivaiyum avaiyum uvaiyum
 ivarum avarum uvarum
 evaiyum evarum taṇṇuḷḷē
 ākiyum ākkiyum kākkum (2170)

Nām avan̄ ivan̄ uvan̄
 avaḷ ivaḷ uvaḷ evaḷ
 tām avar ivar uvar
 atu itu utu etu
 vīm avai ivai uvai
 avai nalam tīṅku avai
 ām avai āy avai
 āy nīṅra avarē (2085).

In the fifteenth poem of *Paripāṭal*, Ḵamperuvalutiyār asks people to think of Tirumāḷiruṅcōlai and go to it worshipping the direction:

With women, with parents
 With children in arms, with kith and kin
 Thinking of the god, go towards the temple
 Worshipping the direction (15: 46-48)

Keeping these lines in mind, Nammālvār says,

I uttered the name of Tirumāḷiruṅcōlai malai
 Tirumāl came to me, entered and filled my heart (3151).

The *Paripāṭal* poets sing the glory of gods such as Thirumāl and Mururkaṇ and of the divinity of the river Vaiyai but not of princes and philanthropists in the hope of being rewarded. Kaṭuvan̄ Ḵaveyinanār’s request to Cevvēḷ in the fifth *Paripāṭal* is remarkable.

. . . what we beg of you
are not, gold and pleasure
but the three, grace, love and virtue (5: 78 – 81)

Such prayers became a model as well as a source of inspiration to the Bhakti poets of the later centuries in whose hymns also we do come across similar lofty ideals. In the seventeenth *Paripāṭal*, Nallaḷuciyaṛ declares,

Avoiding the use of servile flattering words
(in the hope of getting gifts from homo sapiens)
we hail and worship the lovely hill;
with our relatives we pray to them both
so that we may ever live in joy.

Nammālvār eloquently expresses the same sentiment:

The big money earned by praising
The short-lived men, O poets,
What will happen to it?
For how many days will it come to? (2395)

To utter outrageous lies
like lauding a trifle of the earth
by comparing his hand to the rain
and his shoulders to a mountain (2398)

It is also to be noted that Nammālvār uses contemporary colloquial expressions such as 'pōtum', 'manicar', 'parrai', 'paccappacum poykal'. Many of the Alvars and Nayanmars do this perhaps following the model of the *Paripāṭal* poets who, because their hymns were meant for the common people, are found to use words like āmām, itā, ēca, vārum, kaṭuppu and ōṭṭai which might have been used only in the spoken Tamil of their time. Just because of the presence of such words and expressions it is wrong to assign the poems to a few centuries later than the Caṅkam period. The poetics of *Paripāṭal* demands the use of a simple language not requiring elucidation as it should possess the beauty (vaṇappu) of Iḷaiṇ, which is defined by Tolkāppiyar in "Ceyyuliyal".

Compositions in the popular language
that lend to easy understanding
requiring no mental strain
are of the pulan type,

according to the learned (1489)

Avoiding hard consonants (k,c, ṭ,t,p,r)
 using all the five kinds of metrical lines
 (kuraḷaṭi, cintaṭi, aḷavaṭi, neṭilaṭi and kaḷineṭilaṭi)
 and sonorous diction as *said above*,
 – these are the characteristic features of Iḷaipu (1490)

While explaining this definition of Iḷaipu, Naccinārkkinīyar makes it clear that “ōṅkiya molīyāṇ āṅkaṇam Oḷukin” implies the use of words with consonants that sound like long vowels and lā’s and ḷā’s and of a known language that is easily comprehended and need not be learnt the hard way. He adds that *kalippa* and *Paripāṭal* are such compositions that employ a lucid style. Like *pulaṇ*, *iḷaipu* is also expected to use ‘terinta molī’ which Pērācīriyar calls ‘Cērimolī’. This fact about the language of *Paripāṭal* was obviously ignored by scholars like Vaiyapurippillai, who, while fixing the date, made much of its difference from the language of the other Caṅkam writings.

Cāraṅkapāṇi holding the view that *Paripāṭal*, very much like the eight anthologies (eṭṭuttokai), belong to the second century A.D., adduces more than one reason in support of his theory:

1. If there are more of Sanskrit words and mythological allusions in *Paripāṭal* than in the other Caṅkam anthologies it is because the former contains religious poems on Tirumāl and Murukaṇ. If there are words from the Spoken Tamil, it is because *Paripāṭal* is a composition expected to be musical and dramatic.
2. There is nothing wrong in concluding that Marutaṇiḷanākanār, who has paid a tribute to Nallantuvanār in his Akam poem, might have lived after the author of the *Paripāṭal* poem.
3. *Paripāṭal* glorifies the temple of Palatēvan in Aḷakarmalai but there is no reference to such a shrine in the poems of the first three āḷvārs. This means *Paripāṭal* belonged to a period anterior to that of those āḷvārs.
4. All the North Indian words and names in the *Paripāṭal* pieces are given Tamil forms such as ‘nittam’ (for ‘niruttam’), ‘puvvam’ (for ‘pūrvam’) ‘piruṅkalātan’ (pirakalātan). The name kēci is mentioned as “kūntal ennum, peyerōṭu kūntal” (3:31); ‘krauṇcagiri’ becomes ‘pulḷoṭu peyariya poruppu’. All Caṅkam

poems abound in such transformations and the poets seem to be fond of this kind of word-play.

5. The ancientness of *Paripāṭal* is also confirmed by the fact that it uses certain names of numerals which exemplify the rules relating to their formation in *Tolkāppiyam*.

The names of big numbers
end in ai, al, am (*Tol.* 393).

The commentaries on *Tolkāppiyam* cite only three such numbers – *tāmarai*, *veḷḷam* and *āmpal*. In *Caṅkam* poems other than *Paripāṭal*, only *āmpal* and *veḷḷam* are found. But *Kīrantaiyar* in his "*Paripāṭal*" makes use of six words – *neytal*, *kuvaḷai*, *āmpal*, *Caṅkam*, *kamalam*, *veḷḷam*, all of which end in ai, al and am conforming to the *nūrpā* quoted above.

6. Some words that were in vogue during the time of *Paripāṭal* are now used only in modified forms. *Taḷi* (8:99) has become *tuḷi*, *nēṭṭinar* (20:43) *tēṭṭinar* and *tikai* (10:74) *ticaḷi*. Words like *niḷalavai*, *koṭiyavai*, *nāñcilavai*, *aṭṭavai* are to be found only in *Paripāṭal*. It uses *uvamaurupus* like *kalarum*, *uruvina*, *koḷḷum* and *pēniya*, which are not listed by *Tolkāppiyar* in his "*uvamaviyal*". There is the rare use of *'tantārarav'* in the sense of one's parents in the fifteenth *Paripāṭal*.

The precise nature of a *Paripāṭal*, according to *Gopalaiyar*, was not known even to the medieval poets and scholars. A work of the sixteenth century, *Māraṇ Pāppāviṇam*, includes four *Paripāṭals* which are explicitly modeled upon the well-known *Paripāṭals* of the *Caṅkam* anthology, but does not give a clear account of what general and special features of a traditional *Paripāṭal* are to be found in each of them. *Gopalaiyar*'s observation points to the truth that *Paripāṭal* as a literary form is definitely ancient in its origin and development. It may clinch the issue in favour of a very early date for *Paripāṭal*.

In its comment on the first *nūrpā* of *Paripāṭal*, *Iraiyanār Akapporuḷ Urai* states that the poets of the last *Caṅkam* authored the four hundred poems of *Neṭuntokai*, the four hundred poems of *Kuruntokai*, the four hundred poems of *Narrinai*, *Puṇanānūru*, *Aiṅkurunūru*, *Patirruppattu*, one hundred and fifty *Kalippas* and seventy *Paripāṭals*. The fierce debate on the date of *Paripāṭal* that has been going on for a long time ultimately demonstrates that there is no reason why we should disbelieve the statement

with reference to the last two works alone. The accruing scholarship on the Caṅkam writings and the most recent extra-literary findings on the Caṅkam period prove to be more in favour of the age-old belief about the ancient Tamil classics than against them.

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12. EMOTIONS IN ANIMALS: *TOLKĀPPIYAM* AND CAṆKAM POEMS

In the *Royal Society of Literature Review 2007*, there is a brief account of a panel discussion by four experts about the distinctions that might be made between man and other animals. Will Self, author of a novel called *Great Apes* (1997), presenting a London in which chimps have reversed roles with humans, observed that there are no great differences at all between humans and animals and that in the seventeenth century Edward Tyson had placed the monkey higher up in the Great Chain of Being than the Hottentot. He added that modern zoologists have estimated the intelligence of a chimpanzee to be equivalent to that of a two-and-a half-year-old child. Nicky Clayton, Professor of Comparative Cognition at Cambridge, who has made a special study of the intelligent behaviour of members of the crow family, was also of the view that there were no absolute distinctions to be made between man and other members of the natural kingdom. Having been impressed with the humanlike strategies employed by crows, she considered it a pity that so much research on animal intelligence had been focused on primates and suggested that the minds and cultures of *dolphins, elephants and parrots* deserved more attention than they had received. Andrew Whiten, Professor of Evolutionary and Developmental Psychology at the university of St. Andrews, contending that humans and chimps shared a common ancestor six million years ago, pointed to the chimp's success in making and using tools, making social alliances, bluffing, playing politics and forming raiding parties. They possessed even the culture of passing on of traditions and learned patterns of behaviour.

Doris Lessing, the distinguished novelist who has a non-fiction book on cats, claimed that there is rich anecdotal evidence about animal intelligence and behaviour readily to hand. Though scientific research tends to leach individuality out of animals, she was absolutely certain that the cats she watched in her house and garden had individual personalities, emotions and strategies for dealing with life. She wanted zoologists to spend more time examining closely atypical behaviour in cats, dogs and

other species. Clayton mentioned lay observations of rooks co-operating to lift food out of rubbish bins outside motorway café's (RSLR 29-30).

During the learned discussion, it was made clear that modern science is only on the verge of understanding animals like chimps and that not much research has been done on emotions in animals. But there is enough evidence to conclude that the ancient Tamils had as profound an understanding of animals and birds as of humans.

Tolkāppiyam, in its "Marapiyal" speaks of the classification of all living beings into six groups. Those that have only the sense of touch, those that have touch and taste, those that have touch, taste and smell, those that have touch, taste, smell and sight, those that have touch, taste, smell, sight and hearing and those that have touch, taste, smell, sight, hearing and mind are the six types of sense organisms that have been identified by the discerning. *Tolkāppiyar* goes on to give examples of each of these:

The grass and the tree have a single sense;
There are others also of the same class of birth.

The snail and the shell-fish have two senses;
There are others also of the same class of birth.

The termite and the ant have three senses;
There are others also of the same class of birth.

The crab and the beetle have four senses;
There are others also of the same class of birth.

The beasts and beastly men have five senses;
There are others also of the same class of birth.

It is the human beings that have six senses;
There are others also of the same class of birth.

(*Tolkāppiyam* 1519 – 24)

In addition to stating that there are other organisms that have six senses like human beings, *Tolkāppiyar* significantly adds,

They say there are animals that have six senses

(*Tolkāppiyam* 1525)

While interpreting the last Nūṛpa, Ḵampūraṇar observes that besides men and women, there are other beings like *parrots*, *monkeys* and *elephants* which are also endowed with six senses. Pērācīriyar, in his characteristically perceptive manner, remarks that if among animals like monkeys there are sentient beings that have a mind, they will be categorized as six-sense organisms (Vellaivāraṇaṅ 53-54).

Caṅkam poems abound with illustrations of the kind of anecdotal evidence about animal intelligence and behaviour which Doris Lessing privileges over scientific findings. Nicky Clayton's claims on the minds and cultures of monkeys, elephants and parrots are borne out by the picturesque descriptions of the doings of these creatures in several Caṅkam pieces. Tolkāppiyar begins the list of designations with the male of the elephant (*Kaḷiṛu*) and Pērācīriyar justifies it saying that it is the best of animals. The tusker takes pride of place in Akam poems of many kinds. There are references to the male elephant's display of love for its mate when they have to face hardships in a desert. In order to quench the thirst of a female tusker, its companion removes the bark of a tree and lets it drink the water that oozes out (*Kuruntokai* 37,255,307; *Akanānūru* 59,335). The leader of a herd of elephants called ēntal (and yūtanātan during Kampan's time) would, with its sturdy tusks, pierce the bottoms of huge trees and provide the entire group with food (*Kuruntokai* 180, 255). In deserts, male tuskers are often seen attempting to protect their beloved from murderous tigers (*Kuruntokai* 215; *Malaipaṭukaṭām* 307-9).

A male elephant becomes faint and gets confused
when his rut is ended by a tender, rolled-up, young
banana leaf that rubbed against his forehead.
But his female is so understanding that she sighs
painfully, strokes his back and sleeps with him.

(*Kuruntokai* 308)

Monkeys were known to be closer to humans than all the other species of animals. A *Kuruntokai* poem describes the chastity of a female monkey that commits suicide when its life-long partner dies.

O lord of the hills where when a black-eyed,
frisky male monkey passed away,
his beloved wife shunning the life of a widow
left her strong unlearned young
in the care of close relatives

and ended her life
 leaping off the top of a high mountain;
 Do not come at dead of night;
 may you prosper;
 We are worried.

(*Kuṟuntokai* 308)

They adopt extremely clever strategies to steal their food from the millet field where young ladies stand guard scaring away the flock of parrots. The moment the damsels relax their vigilance, the female monkeys get down from the trees and grab as much of the corn as possible (*Kuṟuntokai* 335; *Perumpānarruppaṭai* 393-5). A male monkey reaching the top of a fruit-laden tree shakes its branches while its mate and young ones staying on the ground choose the right ones from among the ripe fruits that fall (*Kuṟuntokai* 278; *Akanānūru* 7).

Parrots do not lag behind homo sapiens in their fondness for music. Much to the dismay of the girls that guard the millet field, a large number of parrots, being enthralled by the songs sung by them and the musical sounds produced by the parrot-driving implement, *Kuḷir*, do not leave the field (*Kuṟuntokai* 291, *Tiṇaimālai Nūrraimpatu* 3). Some of the animals and birds are as much concerned with the welfare of their mates and young ones as long-wedded human couples. When a male deer is captured and taken away by a tiger, its horrified mate saves its young one by running away with it and decides to live a widow's life eating *vēlai* flowers in order to rear the latter (*Puṟanānūru* 23). A *kalittokai* heroine, though grief-stricken when her lover is away, assures herself that the scenes that he may commonly witness in the desert tract may bring him back to her:

"Forests are hard to cross,
 their heat unbearable," he said;
 My girl of golden ear-rings,
 He also said,
 "The elephant there drinks the little water
 muddied by young ones with drum-like feet
 after feeding his mate."

"Forests are painful to pass through
 boughs charred by the heat
 bearing dried up leaves," he said;
 He also said,

“the dove there spreads its soft wings
to soothe with shade its loving tender mate
scorched by the sun.”

“Forests are difficult to reach
dense rays burning bamboos
on the rock,” he said;
He also said,
“The deer there with its body shadow
offers shelter to its young doe
in search of shade.”

(*Kalittokai* II)

It is surprising to note that the Tamils, more than two thousand years ago, had to their credit such profound insights into the animal world and that they had the courage and the wisdom to come to the conclusion that certain animals and birds are in no way inferior to mankind and that they may also possess six senses.

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13. THE MEANING AND END OF LIFE: PLATO AND TIRUVALĻUVAR

In *Tirukkural*, there are some couplets which make us wonder if Valluvar was aware of the life and teachings of Socrates as reported in Plato's writings. But, unfortunately, there is no other evidence, literary or historical, to corroborate this. It is traditionally believed that in the following *Kural* there is a veiled reference to the death of the reputed Greek philosopher:

Those who are desirous of the quintessence of courtesy will drink the poison that is poured for them before their very eyes (580).

The last part of "Phaedo" gives a heart-rending account of the final moments of Socrates:

Crito made a sign to the servant, who was standing by; and he went out, and having been absent for some time, returned with the jailer carrying the cup of poison.... At the same time he handed the cup to Socrates, who in the easiest and gentlest manner, without the least fear or change of colour or feature, looking at the man with all his eyes, Echecrates, as his manner was, took the cup and said: what do you say about making a libation out of this cup to any god? May I, or not? The man answered: we only prepare just so much as we deem enough. I understand, he said: but I may and must ask the gods to prosper my journey from this to the other world – even so – and so be it according to my prayer. Then raising the cup to his lips, quite readily and cheerfully he drank off the poison.

Throughout the tragic happening, Socrates alone is said to have retained his calmness, while everyone else breaks out in a loud and passionate cry. He proves himself to be the very image of courtesy.

The Socratic dialogue-method consists in his demand for accurate definitions of honour, virtue, morality, justice and courage, for clear thinking and exact analysis of complex concepts. Valluvar insists as much on listening to the words of the wise as on learning by oneself.

Listening to learned men may be better than learning by oneself

because it will be to one a stick to lean upon at times of despondency (Tirukkural 414).

One of Socrates' interlocutors, Cephalous, expressing his desire to listen to Socrates as often as possible, tells him,

I find, I can assure you, that in proportion as bodily pleasures lose their savor, my appetite for the things of the mind grows keener and I enjoy discussing them more than ever.

To tell the truth, Cephalous, I answered, I enjoy talking with very old people. They have gone before us on a road by which we too may have to travel, and I think we do well to learn from them what it is like, easy or difficult, rough or smooth (Cornford 4).

Valluvar, in ten of his couplets drives home the benefit of audio-education. When there is no food for the ear, the stomach may be offered a little (412).

The man that has meditated much and has gained a lot of instruction by listening to the wise doesn't talk nonsense even when in error (417).

The ear, even if it can hear, is deaf if it has not been drilled by words of instruction (418).

Those who have not listened to the subtle words of the wise will seldom attain humility of speech (419).

What does it matter if those that know the taste of the tongue but not of the ear live or die? (420).

In every dialogue penned by Plato, his teacher is seen taking enormous pains to elucidate every minute point and to discern all the subtleties of words heard from others. Valluvar says that this is what wisdom demands.

Whatever the wise man speaks, he speaks in such a way that he is understood by everyone; whatever he hears, he understands its profound meanings (424).

Socrates asks the young and the old not to be bothered about the author of a particular view but to ponder over it before accepting or rejecting it.

But that what matters, said Charmides, from whom I heard this? No matter at all, I replied, for the point is not who said the words, but whether they are true or not (Plato 5).

The famed philosopher chides Phaedo for being determined to know about the source of anything he hears before deciding its validity.

There was a tradition in the temple of Dodona that Oaks first gave prophetic utterances. The men of old, unlike in their simplicity to young philosophy, deemed that if they heard the truth even from “Oak or rock”, it was enough for them; whereas you seem to consider not whether a thing is or is not true but who the speaker is and from what country the tale comes (Plato 139).

When he is incarcerated after being sentenced to death, he tells his friends not to take even his words on trust but to examine their worth impassionately.

And I would ask you to be thinking of the truth and not of Socrates; agree with me, if I seem to you to be speaking the truth; or if not withstand me might and main, that I may not deceive you as well as myself in my enthusiasm and like the bee, leave my sting in you before I die (Plato 238).

Valluvar expects this attitude to knowledge from every wise man and stresses it in more than one context.

If you want to know what immaturity is, it is the conceit that tells itself “I possess wisdom” (844).

The lesson that Socrates constantly teaches is that humility is wisdom. If he was called the wisest man by the Oracle, it might have been because he is one who knows that he doesn’t know. It is with missionary zeal that Socrates almost forces everyone by a series of questions to realize that he does not know what he thinks he knows. Valluvar glorifies the wisdom of being aware of one’s ignorance in a casual simile used to describe the pleasure the lover derives from the union with his beloved.

Just as the more one learns the more one becomes aware of one’s ignorance, the more I enjoy her company the more intense my passion for her becomes (1110).

The *Republic* in its first book, outlines some contemporary views of justice, later speaks at length of justice in the state and in the individual and finally describes the rewards of justice in this life and after death. Socrates willingly takes upon himself the task of proving that justice not merely brings external rewards but is intrinsically good as an inward state of the soul, even though the just man may be persecuted rather than rewarded. He contends that “Justice belongs to that highest class of good things which are worth having not only for their consequences, but much more for their own sake – things like sight and hearing, knowledge and health, whose value is genuine and intrinsic, not dependent on opinion”

and that justice, in itself, benefits a man who has it in him, and injustice harms him, leaving rewards and reputation out of account (Cornford 53). “Man’s happiness consists in the full realization of his characteristic virtue and function and his virtue, as a rational being, is a clear insight into the true end of life, knowledge of the good.” (Cornford 212). Justice is better than injustice for its own sake and for the happiness it brings to its possessor. Portraying the philosopher-king and the despot, Socrates contrasts the ideally just man and the ideally unjust and accepts that it may be proclaimed that “the happiest man is he who is first in goodness and justice, namely the true king who is also king over himself and that the most miserable is that lowest example of injustice and vice, the born despot whose tyranny prevails in his own soul and also over his country” (Cornford 306).

At the end of the *Republic*, after narrating the story of Er, Socrates concludes that the myth demonstrates the immortality of the soul and teaches us that “we shall keep always to the upward way and in all things pursue justice with the help of wisdom. Then we shall be at peace with Heaven and with ourselves, both during our sojourn here and when, like victors in the games collecting gifts from their friends, we receive the prize of justice; and so, not here only, but in the journey of a thousand years of which I have told you we shall fare well” (Cornford 359).

What Valluvar calls *Aram* has to be pursued for its own sake as well as for its reward in this life and after death.

Righteousness brings eminence and wealth; what else ennoble one more than righteousness? (31)

There is nothing more profitable than righteousness, nor anything more degrading than the forgetting of it (32).

Be pure in heart; righteousness is just that; all other things are nothing but ostentation (34).

Start practicing righteousness right now without saying, “I will do it later”, for righteousness will be your undying companion when death comes (36).

That which comes of righteousness alone is happiness; all else is misery and devoid of fame besides (30).

In Valluvar’s view also, righteousness is a must for the king:

The prince is one that does not lapse from righteousness, eradicates all that is unrighteous, and guards his honour without ignoring the laws of valour (384).

But elsewhere Valluvar makes it clear that one should be just, righteous and helpful to others even if there is no heavenly recompense.

Receiving is bad even if it may be said that it is the right path to heaven; giving is good even if it may be said that there is no heaven (222).

Here Valluvar is true to the ancient Tamil tradition. A poem by Kopperuñcolan in *Puranānūru* admonished those men without will who wonder whether or not they should perform a righteous act.

Only the wavering with a heart not bereft of dense dirt will not stop doubting if they can do good deeds or not; the one that goes hunting tuskers may catch them; the hunter of small birds may return empty handed; if the great with great aims may enjoy the fruits of their good deeds, they can even gain the pleasure of paradise; if there is no heavenly joy, they can even be freed from the cycle of births; if there is no rebirth, it is great to persist with a blameless body leaving a fame as high as the Himalayan peaks (*Puranānūru* 214).

The four possibilities mentioned here are:

1. You may enjoy the fruits of good deeds here during your life.
2. You may have a place in heaven after death.
3. You may be released from the cycle of births.
4. You would have led a blameless life attaining fame; and that is reward enough.

It is underscored that scepticism about the rewards of virtue should not lead one to a rejection of righteous deeds.

A traditional maxim of Greek morality was that it must be right to help friends and harm enemies. When Polemarchus gives expression to this belief, Socrates denies it and contends that we ought to do good even to those that hate us and that the only thing that is good in itself is virtue.

It can no more be the function of goodness to do harm than of heat to cool or of drought to produce moisture. So if the just man is good, the business of harming people, whether friends or not, must belong to his opposite, the unjust (Conford 14).

It is noteworthy that Socrates, while in prison, dwells at length on the question of doing evil in return for evil, “which is the morality of the many”.

Then we ought not to retaliate or render evil for anyone, whatever evil we may have suffered from him. But I would have you consider,

Crito, whether you really mean what you are saying. For this opinion has never been held, and never will be held, by any considerable number of persons, and those who are agreed and those who are not agreed upon this point have no common ground, and can only despise one another when they see how widely they differ. Tell me then, whether you agree with and assent to my first principle, that neither injury for retaliation nor warding off evil by evil is ever right. And shall that be the premises of our argument (Plato 216).

What Socrates, with much hesitation, labours to demonstrate after a series of questions and answers is that a virtuous man should not think of revenge. Valluvar goes a step further and insists on doing good to one's enemies. Rejecting the path of punishment and violence, he recommends not even the path of forbearance and forgiving but the path of forgetting the evil after doing good.

The way of the pure in heart is not to injure others even if they may gain the wealth that glorifies a man (311).

How should a man punish those that have injured him? Let him put them to shame by doing them a good turn and forgetting both (314).

Of what use is intelligence to a man if he does not treat others' pain as his own? (315).

On the eve of his death Socrates tells his friends that a true philosopher won't be scared of death for death is but sleep and like waking eventuates in return of life.

Well, and is there not an opposite of life, as sleep is the opposite of waking?... The state of sleep is opposed to the state of waking, and out of sleeping waking is generated, and out of waking, sleeping and the process of generation is in the one case falling asleep, and in the other waking up... Then here is a new way by which we arrive at the conclusion that the living come from the dead, just as the dead come from the living, and this, if true, affords a most certain proof that the world of the dead exist in some place out of which they come again (Plato 227).

Without much ado, Valluvar uses the same metaphor to aver that just as sleep follows waking, death inevitably follows life.

Death is like falling into sleep and birth is like waking from sleep (330). And Valluvar has more to mock the stupidity of fear of death.

The man that was yesterday has ceased to be today; this greatness this world has. (336).

The Tamil poet doesn't stop here but ventures to express his doubt and sympathy regarding the plight of all living beings.

Is there no permanent home for the soul which has taken shelter in the body? (340).

At the end of the *Republic* and in other dialogues, Plato expresses his firm belief that the soul is indestructible, immortal and able to endure all good and ill. It is evident that he believes in the divine origin of the soul, in its fall to be incarnated in a cycle of births as a punishment for former sins, in the judgment after death, in the suffering of the unjust and the happiness of the just, in the millennial intervals between incarnations and in the hope of final release for the purified.

To a philosopher, death is but the deliverance of the soul from the body.

And in this the philosopher dishonours the body; his soul runs away from his body and desires to be alone and by herself (Plato 224).

In “Meno”, the Greek philosopher affirms that virtue cannot be taught and that what we call learning is only a process of recollection.

The soul, then, as being immortal, and having been born again many times, and having seen all things that exist, whether in this world or in the world below, has knowledge of them all; and it is no wonder that she should be able to call to remembrance all that she ever knew about virtue and about everything (Plato 180).

Some of these ideas are repeated in “Phaedo” with greater emphasis and conviction.

If death had only been the end of all, the wicked would have had a good bargain in dying, for they would have been happily quit not only of their body but of their own evil together with their souls. But now, inasmuch as the soul is manifestly immortal, there is no release or salvation from evil except the attainment of the highest virtue and wisdom. For the soul when on her progress to the world below takes nothing with her but nurture and education: and these are said greatly to benefit or greatly to injure the departed, at the very beginning of his journey thither (Plato 246).

Since the soul is in the very likeness of the divine, and immortal, intellectual, uniform, indissoluble and unchangeable and the body is in the very likeness of the human, mortal, intellectual, multiform, dissoluble and changeable, “when the soul and the body are united, then nature orders the soul to rule and govern and the body to obey and serve” (Plato 232).

There are *Kural*s which witness to Valluvar’s belief in the life after

death and in the efforts a human being should make in order to escape the cycle of births.

The intimacy between the body and the soul is like the one between the bird and the egg that is left behind when the former flies away (338).

The need to keep the senses under control is stressed by the Tamil poet also.

The man that controls with his will power all his five senses just as the goading hook controls the elephant is a seed fit for the best of all lands (24).

What one learns in one's birth is retained in future births.

The knowledge that a man acquires in one birth will help him in all seven births (398).

A man that is blessed with good children may not be tainted by evil in all seven births.

If one has children of immaculate character,
One won't be touched by evil in all seven births (62).

In order to emphasise the value of education in one case and to glorify the joy of having one's children in another, Valluvar refers to the traditional belief in seven births and avoids indulging in speculations about the life after death or about the various births and the nature of the final cessation of births but Plato does not mind doing these while narrating the myth of Er. Unlike Valluvar, he presents his wild surmises about the journey of the soul and the structure of the universe as though they were confirmed truths. At the circumference of Plato's spherical universe the fixed stars revolved in 24 hours from East to West, with a motion which carries with it all the contents of the world whereas the earth at the centre rotates daily on its axis (which is also the axis of the universe) so as exactly to counteract the daily rotation in the opposite side of the whole universe, with the result that the earth is at rest in absolute space, while the heavenly bodies revolve around it (Cornford 349-50). Valluvar, on the other hand, has no such cosmology of his own and makes the minimum use of Indian mythology only when it is required to explain some idea forcefully. Because of this practice on his part, there is very little in *Tirukkural* which modern science would reject.

Another notable difference between their contentions regarding the

relationship between the body and the soul is that the Greek valorizes the soul at the expense of the body:

For the body is a source of endless trouble to us by reason of the mere requirement of food; and is liable also to diseases which overtake and impede us in the search after true being: it fills us full of loves and lusts, and fears and fancies of all kinds and endless foolery and in fact, as men say, takes away from us the power of thinking at all. It has been proved to us by experiences that if we would have pure knowledge of anything we must be quit of the body (Plato 224).

This belief leads Plato's philosopher to be entirely concerned with the soul and not with the body. He is waiting restlessly for the day when he can get away from the body and turn to the soul.

This kind of denigration of the body Valluvar won't approve of though he has a word of praise for the ascetics who lead a life of renunciation. They are not slaves but masters of the sense organs and have renounced earthly pleasures for the sake of good conduct. Unlike Plato's philosophers, they don't treat life with contempt but know the various truths of the five, namely, taste, light, touch, sound and smell, which constitute the experiences of this world.

The world is comprehended only by him
Who has researched into the ways of the five-taste,
light, touch, sound and smell. (27)

In his case, there is no life-negation. To Plato, the philosopher is the roof and crown of all created beings but to Valluvar, it is the householder accepting life with all its miseries and living it properly who has to be privileged over the ascetic.

Plato's philosopher will be absorbed in the pleasures of the soul and will not think much of human life. Plato himself disliked the distractions of family affections. His attitude to the physical relationship was one of contempt as he considered the instinct an unruly one. Valluvar, on the other hand, celebrates family life, the blessings of helpmate and the joy of having one's own children in three different chapters of ten couplets each.

If one leads family life in the righteous manner,
what is he going to gain by seeking asceticism, the other way of life?
(46)

He who lives life here as he ought to live will be placed among the gods who live in heaven (50).

The best blessing is an honourable home; and having worthy children is its crowning glory (60).

This is a far cry from Plato's conviction that among the guardians of the ideal republic both family and private property should be abolished.

The question of fate versus freedom of the will is discussed in some detail in the last dialogue of the *Republic*. Every human being chooses his or her own destiny. The daemon (guardian spirit, genius, personified destiny) does not cast lots for the souls but an individual is allotted to it as its portion.

Let him to whom the first lot falls choose first a life to which he will be bound of necessity. But virtue owns no master, as a man honors or dishonors her, so shall he have more of her or less, the blame is his who chooses; heaven is blameless (Cornford 355).

Plato believes that in life there is an element of necessity or change, as well as an element of choice, which makes us, and not heaven, responsible for the good and evil that happen to us. Homer's description of Zeus as 'the dispenser of both good and ill', is condemned as a foolish error and it is added that the divine, being good, is not responsible for everything in human life, but only for a small part; for the good things in human life are far fewer than the evil and whereas the good must be ascribed to heaven only, we must look elsewhere for the cause of evils (Cornford 71). Poets may be allowed to represent any examples of self-control and fortitude on the part of famous heroes but young men must not be told that gods and great prizes may be won by gifts.

Very much like the Greeks of his time, Plato accepts the Oracle at Delphi as the national authority and concedes that religious institutions will be regulated by it. The founding of temples, sacrifices, and the cults of gods, demi-gods and heroes, the burial of the dead, and services to propitiate the powers of the other world, believed to be institutions of the highest worth, must be left to the Delphian Apollo.

These are matters we do not understand ourselves, and in founding our commonwealth, we shall be wise to consult no other religious authority than our national divinity. Indeed in religious matters, the authority of this god, from his seat at the very navel of the

earth, may be said to extend to all mankind (Conford 118).

The first and foremost of Western rationalists has approved of some of the superstitious beliefs of his people. It is also believed by Plato that when each generation has educated others like themselves to take their place as guardians of the commonwealth, they will depart to live in the Islands of the Blest (Conford 262). In fact, Plato held that the heavenly bodies themselves are immortal living creatures, i.e. gods (Conford 218).

In the last chapter of *Arattuppāl*, Vaḷḷuvar speaks of fate, which is denoted by the Tamil words, Ūḷ, Pāl, Muṛai, Uṇmai, Teyvam, Niyati, and Viti. Ūḷ means something ripe for enjoyment and an order involving cause and effect. Niyati indicates uniformity of nature in the universe which includes mental, spiritual and material spheres. Pāl is one's innate nature or inborn endowment or one's own natural share in the universe. Though Parimēlaḷakar equates uṇmai with 'fate', in the phrase "uṇmai aṛivu" used by Vaḷḷuvar, it may mean one's own innate knowledge, a concept very close to what Plato mentions when he contends that all knowledge is only a recollection. Vaḷḷuvar uses 'teyvam' and "ulakattu Iyarkai" (the nature of the world) also to refer to fate. Ākūḷ and pōkūḷ mean benign fate and malign fate (fortune and misfortune) respectively. Iḷavūḷ is a synonym of the latter. All these terms bear testimony to the traditional Tamil concern with the idea of destiny and its role in life. Some of the couplets in the chapter on fate are unfortunately, too pithy to yield a single definite interpretation.

If determination is born of fortune, sloth takes hold at the time of misfortune. When destiny is malignant, one's intelligence is confounded; when destiny is benign, it gets enriched. Though one may study several complex and abstruse writings one's own true intelligence will ultimately prevail. The nature of the world is of two different kinds: wealth is one thing, becoming an enlightened being is another. When one wants to acquire wealth, fortune makes all things favourable, misfortune makes everything detrimental. What is not decreed to be one's own will not stay even if it is painstakingly guarded; what is destined to be one's own will not leave even if thrown out. Even to those who have amassed wealth to the tune of crores, enjoyment is not possible except as ordained by the ordainer. The poor that cannot enjoy life would renounce the world if destiny would pass by without afflicting them with miseries that are their share. Those that rejoice when things go well – why should they feel miserable when things go awry? What are there that can be mightier

than destiny? Even if its victim is hatching a plot to overcome it, it will prevail (371-80).

Valluvar also seems to feel that since the ways of destiny are inscrutable and inexplicable in terms of what happens in this birth, one has to seek recourse to a belief in *iruvinaṭai* (two kinds of deeds accounting for our joys and sorrows) as well as in the cycle of births. But very much like Plato, he does not approve of lack of will and determination to achieve what one can under the pretext that all efforts will be set at naught by an overriding destiny. He stresses again and again that there is absolutely no excuse for discarding the path of righteousness. Also one comes across couplets in other chapters which advise those desirous of fame to boldly face misfortune and not to be cowed down by calamities which are inevitable.

It is no shame if fortune fails a man;
But it is a disgrace to lack perseverance. (618)

Even if an attempt fails because of divine
Decree, industry will pay the wages of labour. (619)

Those who strive hard without succumbing
to despair will vanquish Fate. (620)

Though apparently contradicting what he has said earlier about the omnipotence of fate, Valluvar, in the last couplet (620), drives home the point that man should not lose heart when assailed by misfortune in the form of adverse circumstances.

Many of Plato's literary and philosophical tools are at his beck and call in *Symposium*, in which Phaedrus, Pausanios, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Agathon, and Socrates pay eloquent tributes to love identifying and revealing in vivid details its characteristic features through more than one myth. Love is a mighty god, wonderful in his birth for he is the oldest of the gods and the foremost author and giver of virtue in life and of happiness after death. As there are two goddesses, the heavenly Aphrodite and the common Aphrodite, there must be two kinds of love associated with them. The former is the daughter of Uranus and has no mother while the latter is the daughter of Zeus and Dione. The love which is the offspring of the common Aphrodite is essentially common, indiscriminate, mean and vulgar inasmuch as it is apt to be of women as

well as youths and is of the body rather than of the soul. But since the offspring of the heavenly Aphrodite is derived from a father in whose birth the female has no part, there is nothing of wantonness in her. The double love is not merely an affection of the soul of man towards the fair or towards anything but is to be found in the bodies of all animals, in productions of earth and in all that is. The sexes were not two as they are now but originally three in number, man, woman and the union of the two. Since human nature was originally one and we were a whole, love is nothing but the desire and pursuit of the whole.

Love is the most blessed because he is endowed with beauty, grace, courage, justice, temperance and wisdom. He is a poet and the cause of poetry in others. Love is also a philosopher or lover of wisdom who is in a mean between the wise and the ignorant for his father is wealthy and wise and his mother poor and foolish. It may be generally described as the love of the everlasting possession of the good. One need not marvel at the love which all men have of their offspring because that love is for the sake of immortality (Plato 152-166).

These fulsome praises of love are followed by Socrates's recollection of his meeting with Diotima who once initiated him into the rites of exalted eroticism, a series of steps to philosophical wisdom. First a man develops an appreciation for the physical beauty of a young boy. He then learns to realize that no one body is anymore beautiful than another and thus he loves all bodies equally. Later he comes to value mental beauty (customs, activities and laws) more than physical beauty, and he wants to cultivate the former in others. Seeking knowledge, he gives birth to many beautiful theories and ideas, till he finds a unique kind of beauty. Finally, he is able to see a singular beauty that is eternal, absolute, divine, constant and independent of particular beautiful things. The initiation evidently involves a series of abstractions, away from particular sensible objects towards objects of thoughts culminating in a vision of beauty itself (Holowchak 420-21).

The third and final part of *Tirukkural* is reserved for an unparalleled celebration of the passionate love of youth and maid, of man and wife, and its joys and sorrows. In twenty five chapters of ten couplets each, in two sections called secret courtship and wedded love, Valluvar, following the conventions of the unique Tamil Akam tradition, reveals in matchless dramatic monologues the varied moods of lovers in union as well as in

separation. There are soliloquies by one or the other of the lovers or dialogues between the hero and his male companion or between the heroine and her confidante and occasionally between the lovers expressing their intimate feelings indicative of the author's absolute mastery of human psychology. Leaving much to the imagination of the reader and never bordering on vulgarity, these exquisite verses describe carnal love and moments of carnality without any attempt at debasing love of man and woman or at making it an explicit allegory of the spiritual yearnings of the human being for union with God. This is one of the rarest cases of a philosopher and a philosophy of love accepting this aspect of man-woman relationship as a praiseworthy part of human life.

Valluvar, of course, speaks of other forms of human love, especially love for fellow human beings as well as for all earthly beings in other chapters. There are separate chapters called children, love, hospitality, sweet speech, gratitude, charity and giving up meat, all of which stress in different ways universal love. The innate feeling of love, according to Valluvar, is the hallmark of every human being.

They say that it is to taste the life of love that the soul has been united with the body (71).

The very bliss on earth is the result of a life of love (st. 75).

Just as the boneless worm is burnt up by the sun, the loveless being will be destroyed by Aram (st. 77).

Loveless beings live in vain. Their life is like the flourishing of a withered tree upon parched desert (st. 78).

Of what avail is a lovely outside, when the soul within is devoid of love? (st. 79).

Love is natural for every being; bodies of loveless beings are only bodies wrapped in skin (st. 8).

Valluvar doesn't want the ascetics to leave the world of men and women and live in jungles. They should, on the other hand, cultivate the highest and most divine form of love for all creations, which is called Arul (Grace).

That world is not for those lacking in Arul

Just as this world is not for those lacking in wealth (st. 247).

Plato and Valluvar are found to be kindred spirits with regard to many of their views on the meaning and end of life though there are certain vital

differences which cannot be ignored. When it comes to cosmopolitanism and internationalism, the Tamil poet scores heavily over the Greek philosopher. Conford, an authority on Greek literature has observed that Plato, chiefly inspired by a feeling for the unity of the Greek race, expresses no humanitarian sympathy extending beyond the borders of Hellas (168). This is quite evident from the statement attributed to Plato:

“I thank God”, he used to say, “that I was born Greek and not barbarian, free man and not slave, man and not woman; but above all, that I was born in the age of Socrates.”

(Will Durant 12)

He preferred to be a human being of his time, his nation, his race, his society and his sex. Valluvar, on the other hand, given his world view would have nothing to do with any single caste, creed, race, religion, society or nation. All men and women are his kin and every place on this earth is his.

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14. ON FRIENDSHIP

ARISTOTLE AND TIRUVAḤḤUVAR

The scrutiny of friendship was an integral part of moral and political philosophy in the past, as evidenced by Plato's discussion of it in his dialogues *The Lysis* and *Symposion* and Aristotle's thorough examination of it in *Nicomachean Ethics*. The greatest of Roman orators, Cicero, deals with it in his treatise *De Amicitia*, Montaigne's *Essais*, an unsystematic but thorough record of the French writer's reflections on his life, his reading, contemporary events and on general moral problems, has one chapter on friendship. His junior English contemporary, Francis Bacon, wrote one essay on the subject in 1612 and another in 1625 containing clear echoes of the French piece.

The highest form of love, in Plato's view, is a spirited companionship between two persons of the same sex untouched by eroticism. In *The Lysis*, since the subject is friendship, or rather the attraction of one person for another in all its varieties, he chooses an appropriate setting in which Socrates, two schoolboys who are fast friends and two youths who are their admirers are the chief characters. Advising the boys that they should be good and useful if they are to win friends, Socrates starts examining Homer's statement that the gods make friends by drawing like to like. He finally demonstrates that neither similars nor opposites can be friends to each other. The dialogue takes us nowhere as Socrates himself indulges in sophistic and fallacious arguments without throwing any valuable hint. He is clearly trapped by the ambiguities of the Greek word and what emerges is an unattractive and baffling view of friendship. We feel that critics are just in rejecting *The Lysis*, *Euthyphro*, *Laches* and *Charmides* as each of these has failed in its attempt to define a single virtue. It is in *The Symposion* that Plato succeeds famously in describing his unique concept of love.¹

Both with regard to content and form, there are vital differences between Plato's and Aristotle's ethics; and this is especially true of their approach to friendship. Plato contends that only the philosopher can be

truly happy as he alone at the end of a long and arduous training learns to turn away from the confusing world of ordinary experiences to contemplate the Forms. Aristotle's view is more mundane. To him, moral virtue is not out of the reach of common man. Though, like Plato, Aristotle holds the contemplative life to be superior to the life of action, he takes the virtues associated with the latter to be characteristic of human beings as human beings. If, according to Plato, it is a degradation for the philosopher to come down to the terra firma after having gained a vision of the Good, for Aristotle, practical activity in the social and political sphere is typically human.

It is Cicero who regards friendship as the greatest of all the gifts the gods have bestowed upon mankind, the single exception being wisdom. He places friendship above every other human concern that can be imagined.

Nothing in the whole world is so completely in harmony with nature, and nothing so utterly right, in prosperity and adversity alike.²

Examining the origins of friendship, Cicero claims that they lie in something primeval and noble, something emanating directly from the actual processes of nature.

.... It must be a product of nature rather than of any deficiency. It cannot under any circumstances be derived from any calculation of potential profit. It comes from a feeling of affection, an inclination of the heart.³

As proof, he mentions the fact that it is from love, *amor*, that the word friendship, *amicitia*, is derived. Cicero repeatedly asserts that only good men have the capacity to be good friends and that friendship of the virtuous is desirable for its own sake and for itself. Nature abhors solitude and for any human being the best support of all is a good friend. The Roman philosopher draws our attention to the inspired Greek poem in which Empedocles sang that all things in nature and the universe, whether stationary or moving, are united by friendship.⁴

Montaigne's essay on friendship is very different from the rest of his work inasmuch as it is a passionately moving, intensely felt and tender account of his love for his friend, La Boétie, as well as a grand celebration of friendship itself. He makes a distinction between what he calls acquaintance and sovereign and perfect friendship, which, he concedes, is rarely found.

But in the friendship I speak of, they (friends) mix and work themselves

into one piece, with so universal a mixture, that there is no more sign of the seam by which they were first conjoined. All things, wills, thoughts, opinions, goods, wives, children, honours, and lives, being in effect common betwixt them, and that absolute concurrence of affections being no other than one soul in two bodies (according to the very proper definition of Aristotle), they can neither lend nor give anything to one another.⁶

Common friendship will admit of division; one may love the beauty of this person, the good-humour of that, the liberality of a third, the paternal affection of a fourth, the fraternal love of a fifth and so the rest; but this friendship that possesses the whole soul, and there rules and sways with an absolute sovereignty, cannot possibly admit a rival.⁷

Unlike his predecessors, Montaigne explores the range of human activity and sensibility without methodically analyzing or systematizing it. "He is not concerned to arrive at a systematic corpus of knowledge about man, since for him philosophy is a form of activity rather than a description of ultimate truth. His purpose is more personal than theoretical, more poetic than philosophical."⁸ What may alienate him from his readers is the theme of vanity, or of human insignificance that is at the heart of his vision of life. To him, man is no more than a beast. His cynicism rears its ugly head in his comparison between friendship and 'the love we bear to women'.

The fire of this, I confess ... is more active, more eager, and more sharp; but withal, it is more precipitant, fickle, moving and inconstant; a fever subject to intermissions and paroxysms, that has ceased but on one part of us. Whereas in friendship, it is a general and universal fire, but temperate and equal, a constant established heat, all gentle and smooth, without poignancy or roughness. Moreover, in love, it is no other than frantic desire for that which flies from us.⁹

Understandably, Bacon was inspired by Montaigne's treatment of the subject. Bacon's essays are found to be cold and practical compared to other Renaissance writings on friendship, though the one called "On Friendship" is an eloquent plea for the need for friendship. The first two fruits of friendship, he says, are peace in the emotions and support of the judgment.

For friendship maketh indeed a fair day in the affections, from storm and tempests; but it maketh daylight in the understanding, out of darkness and confusion of thoughts.¹⁰

These are followed by the last fruit, which is "aid and bearing a part in

all actions and occasions”.¹¹ But in other essays, where his moral philosophy smacks of Machiavelli, he is seen to be skeptical of both love and friendship. Of love, he writes,

It is a strange thing to note the excess of this passion ... you may observe that amongst all the great and worthy persons (whereof the memory remaineth either ancient or recent), there is not one that hath been transported to the mad degree of love; which shows that great spirits and great business do keep out this weak passion.¹²

Though he might have known about the celebrated friendship of Michelangelo and Cavalieri, Montaigne and La Boétie, Sir Philip Sidney and Hubert Languet, he asserts that friends are chiefly a means to power. In his discussion of friendship, Bacon can never be as profound as Aristotle or Tiruvalluvar but all the time gives expression to his cynicism and distrust of man.

Love your friend as if he were to become your enemy, and your enemy as if he were to become your friend.¹³

Do not betray even to your friend too much of your real purpose and thoughts; in conversation, ask questions oftener than you express opinions; and when you speak, offer data and information rather than beliefs and judgments.¹⁴

Of all these meditations on friendship the one that is closest to Tiruvalluvar is that of Aristotle. The worldview that has given birth to Montaigne's and Bacon's cynical attitudes to love and friendship would have been Valluvar's abhorrence. Even Cicero's account, in the form of a discussion, sounds a little too calculating and appears to be meant mainly for his own society and his own times as he is interested in considering how far personal friendship is compatible with political oppositions that were inevitable during his period. While proceeding from life's experiences to reasoned universal judgments, while asserting emphatically that virtue and vice are within the power of homo sapiens and, especially while elevating friendship to a very high level in the list of universal human concerns, Aristotle reminds us more of Tiruvalluvar than of any other of his own Western disciples.

Making a distinction between the contemplative life and the life of action, Aristotle holds the former to be far superior to the latter. The *Phronimos* leads a good moral life, a life of temperance, courage, justice and continence, realizes his obligations of justice to others, knows the

value of emotions and cultivates them through the series of moral virtues. The *sophos*, on the other hand, exercising his intellect in contemplation of the most exalted part of reality, its essences, needs very little external goods. The life of *theoria* led by the *sophos* is, according to Aristotle, more divine than human, whereas the whole moral life and happiness of the *phronimos* is only secondary. For Aristotle, man is a composite being, part animal, part divine and the virtues associated with the life of action are characteristic of human beings qua human beings, while the life according to reason is something super-human.

Valluvar also speaks of two kinds of life – the life of the householder and the life of the ascetic but gives equal importance to both. The former, in fact, should lead to the latter. The greatest blessing, in Valluvar's view, is an honourable home, the crowning glory of which is worthy offspring.¹⁵ The householder, being the best of those who strive for salvation, is the mainstay of all who follow the other three paths of life – the celibates, the lay ascetics, and the ascetics. Leading a virtuous life himself, he helps others in the observance of their vows and is, therefore, holier than the austere ones themselves. If he lives as he ought to live, he will be looked upon as a god among men. Love of mankind, hospitality, uprightness, forgiveness, obligations and good will to all, charity, self-control, purity of conduct and refraining from slander, vain-speaking and from evil-doing are among the chief virtues of those who have chosen to lead the family life whereas the other group should practice mercy, abjure meat, undertake penance, abstain from fraud and anger and thereby gain a higher spiritual power and vision. Most of the virtues mentioned in the two lists are common to both the groups though catalogued separately to indicate priority and the householder is expected to ascend a few rings on the ladder of life, realize the truth and renounce his attachments to this world. If family-life is not an end in itself but only a path to asceticism which leads to Godhead, the ascetic, giving up all sensuous pleasures, becomes the very embodiment of charity, as love for all creatures, compassion of the supreme kind alone is his ally in asceticism.

It is because of this emphasis on the value of life on the earth that Albert Schweitzer called *Tirukkural* "the living ethic of love".

There hardly exists in the literature of the world a collection of maxims in which we find so much lofty wisdom. ... On the most varied questions concerning the conduct of man to himself and to the world, its utterances are characterized by nobility and good sense. ... Maxims about joy in

activity, such as one would not expect from Indian lips, bear witness to the strength of the world and the life affirmation present in the *Kural*.¹⁶

Aristotle contends that the aim of life is not goodness for its own sake but happiness. Man's happiness lies in the full functioning of his power of thought, his reasoning ability. Virtue, which contributes to one's happiness, is not the possession of the simple man, but the achievement of experience while the road to virtue is the middle way or the golden mean. Very often the extremes are vices and the middle quality is a virtue or an excellence.

So between cowardice and rashness is courage; between stinginess and extravagance is liberality; between sloth and greed is ambition; between humility and pride is modesty; between secrecy and loquacity, honesty; between moroseness and buffoonery, good humour; between quarrelsomeness and flattery, friendship; between Hamlet's indecisiveness and Quixote's impulsiveness is self-control.¹⁷

Obviously, the golden mean is not, like the mathematical mean, an exact average of two calculable extremes but fluctuates with circumstances of each situation and reveals itself only to mature reason. This doctrine of the mean is found to be the formulation of a characteristic attitude which appears in many systems of Greek philosophy including Plato's and Aristotle's. There is evidence to indicate that the Tamils also set great store on the concept of the golden mean. T.P.Meenakshisundaran, for instance, observes that the fact the Tamils have chosen to name a collection of poems of moderate length *Narṇai*, as different from *Kuruntokai* and *Neṭuntokai* which are collections of short and long poems respectively, reveals their faith in the golden mean as *ṭṇai* means discipline.

Tiruvalluvar's emphasis on the *via media* may be evident in the many modifications of the concepts of virtues he recommends. One should be courageous but not rash:

Not to fear what ought to be feared is folly; it is the duty of the wise to dread what is to be dreaded (st. 428).

It is good to be generous but not extravagant:

The wealth of a man will dwindle into nothing,
if he, unmindful of its limits, lavishes it with an unsparing hand (st. 480).

One should be enterprising but greed will lead to disaster:

Those who have climbed to the top of the tree will lose their lives if they attempt to climb still higher (st. 476).

The gift of the tongue is the rarest of gifts but garrulity is a curse:

Those who are incapable of expressing themselves in a few faultless words would love to speak a lot (st. 649).

Valluvar uses the phrases 'aḷavinkāṇ', 'aḷavarintār-' 'aḷavalla' in verses 286, 287, 288 and 289 to underscore the need for a sense of discrimination. While condemning fraud, he observes,

The man that has weighed the things of this world and made his heart firm will not commit the folly of cheating his neighbour (st. 287).

Two similes used in different contexts indicate his desire to draw our attention to the golden mean as the path to righteousness.

Even peacock's feathers will break the axle of a cart if it is loaded with too many of them (st. 475).

Like the scales that remain equipoised and weigh justly, the wise will incline neither to this side nor to that and this uprightness is their glory (st. 118).

Aristotle, though advocating the golden mean unambiguously, makes it clear that it is not enough for happiness. We must have worldly goods which alone can give us freedom from care and greed. Valluvar points out the need for riches more emphatically:

Just as this world is not for those that lack wealth, the other world is not for those that want charity. (st. 247)

Aristotle's ideal man, who is no mere metaphysician, is described as follows in the fourth book of *Ethics*:

He does not expose himself needlessly to danger but is willing to give even his life in great crises. He is eager to do service to men though ashamed of having a service done to him.

He never feels malice and always forgets and ignores injuries. He does not speak evil of others, even of his enemies, unless it be to themselves. He bears the accidents of life with dignity and grace, making the best of his circumstances.¹⁸

Valluvar's ideal man may also be described in similar terms. But then we cannot ignore the vital differences between their attitudes to life.

Aristotle's superman, philosophically inclined, does not take life very seriously, talks and acts frankly, because of his contempt for men and things and is not prone to vehemence, for he thinks nothing very important. But the householder as well as the ascetic, as conceived by Valluvar, considers life a vale of soul-making, is prepared to learn from all experiences and would never treat his fellow-human beings with contempt on any account. Aristotle's man of virtue is his best friend taking delight in privacy. Valluvar's man may be a householder or a vānaprasta or a sanyasin but should consider it his prime duty to live for others. Compassion for all living beings is the chief virtue of the ascetic. No charity, no asceticism.

The Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle's ethical treatise, composed in Athens at the Lyceum in the fourth century B.C., speaks of the virtues, the forms of friendship, the varieties of pleasure and the nature of happiness. Of the two books on the subject of friendship, Book VIII is divided into three parts: Part I discusses the need, nature and kinds of friendship; Part II analyses the social aspects of friendship; Part III examines the obligations towards one's friend. Book IX continues the discussion on the same subject in Part I, before passing on to the dissolution of friendship when obligations are not met. Self-love as the basis of friendship as well as other features of friendship is brought in in Part II. The connection between friendship and happiness is the burden of Part III. His avowed objective is to examine the most notable kinds of life, the life of pleasure, the political life and contemplative life and to judge the worth of each according to its contribution to human well-being. Since he discusses friendship in two books, to the three human lives one may add the life of friendship as a special type of happy life.

The architectonics of *Tirukkural* is much more complex. A comprehensive and penetrating study of ethics, polity and love, written sometime between second and fourth century A.D., it consists of 1330 couplets divided into 133 sections of 10 distichs each – the first thirty-eight on Aram (virtue, moral and cosmic order), the next 70 on Porul (wealth, social life and political skill) and the last twenty-five on Kāmam (pleasure). The first four chapters, beginning with one in praise of God, serve as a kind of prologue to the entire work while the rest of the chapters in Part I, expatiating on righteousness, define the virtues associated with family life and asceticism. In the second part which purports to be on the body politic, there are sections on 1. kingship, 2. limbs of state such as the minister, the country, the fortress, the army and the king's associates, and

finally 3. the subjects. The third part, in its two broad sections, dealing with secret courtship and wedded love, presents a number of dramatic scenes, each of which is brief but striking and contains a refined analysis of varying moods of lovers in a rare fusion of psychology and aesthetics.

The sub-divisions in the first two parts are not to be treated as watertight compartments; many of the virtues listed in the first part are common to the householder and the ascetic and most of the verses in the second part are equally applicable to the king and the common man. It is often stated that the *Ethics* and the *Politics* of Aristotle are together concerned with the good of man qua member of a city-state and that the two works must be regarded as supplementing each other and as expressing Aristotle's conception of the good of man, and of the conditions of securing and maintaining it.¹⁹ This is equally true of the first two parts of *Tirukkural* also.

Emphasising the complex nature of the subject of friendship, Valluvar treats it in diverse sections under different headings. In the section on the householder's virtues, it is discussed as love (chapter 8), in the section on the king's virtues, it is brought in under the two headings, Gaining the Friendship of Wise Men (ch.45) and Not keeping Bad Company (ch.46). As one of the members of the body politic, it receives detailed treatment in five chapters – Friendship (ch.79), Testing Friendship (ch.80), Intimate Friendship (ch.81), Evil Friendship (ch.82), and Insincere Friendship (ch. 83). The highest and the most divine form of love, the most disinterested love for all living beings, is called *Arul* by Valluvar and discussed in a separate chapter in the section on asceticism.

Friendship, according to Aristotle, is necessary for a good and happy life, since it plays an indispensable role in social and political life. It is a conscious, reciprocal well-wishing based on the good qualities of friends. What, then, is the basis of friendship? Aristotle's answer is that self-love (*to philauton*) is the standard model and real basis of every friendship. His contention is that all the sentiments found in true friendship have their proto-type in genuine self-love. A man's friend is another self, an extension of his own self. The more he properly loves himself, the more he imparts true love to his friends. An evil man cannot have friendly feelings towards himself. Aristotle is of the view that true self-love has to be distinguished from false self-love. A man's self-love is to be blamed only when he appropriates for himself a larger share than his due of material goods,

honours and bodily pleasures. If a man is determined to do what is just, temperate, courageous and wise, he appears to be the true self-lover. To Aristotle, true self-love toward true self is not selfish or self-centred egoism.

It may be noted here that in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* also, there is a slightly different elaboration of the theme that our love for the self is the basis for our love of all other objects. In a celebrated dialogue, Maitrayi tells Yajnavalkya:

Verily, not for the love of the husband, my dear, is the husband dear (to his wife), but for the love of the Self, the husband is dear (to his wife). Verily, not for the love of the wife, my dear, is the wife, dear (to her husband), but for the love of the Self, is the wife dear (to her husband). Verily not for the love of the sons, my dear, are sons dear (to their parents), but for the love of the Self, are the sons dear (to their parents). ... Verily, not for the love of all, my dear, is all dear, but for the love of the Self is all dear.²⁰

But, unlike Aristotle, the *Upanishad*, identifying the self with God, states that it must be understood that all objects are united in Him, the Self, just as the divine limbs to the body.

Valluvar mentions the basis of friendship in his chapter “Anpuṭaimai” (Love). Friendship is ultimately due to the innate feeling of love, which is the hallmark of every human being.

Love begets desire, and desire begets the immeasurable excellence of friendship. (st. 74)

They say that it is to taste the life of love that the soul has been united with the body. (st. 73)

The very bliss on earth is the result of a life of love (st. 75). Just as the boneless worm is burnt up by the sun, the loveless being will be destroyed by Aram (righteousness) (st. 77). Loveless beings live in vain. The life of the loveless being is like the flourishing of a withered tree upon parched desert (st. 78). Of what avail is a lovely outside, when the soul within is devoid of love? (st. 79). Love is natural for every being; bodies of loveless beings are only bones wrapped in skin (st. 80). In such assertions, Valluvar is true to the Tamil literary tradition which swears by the essential oneness of mankind, universal love and viewing God as the very embodiment of love.

Aristotle's emphasis on self-love as the basis of friendship and

Valluvar's on love are typical of their world-views. The Greek philosopher's moral system, for the most part, "is decidedly self-centred. ... Outside the books on friendship very little is said to suggest that men can and should take a warm personal interest in other people; altruism is completely absent. Traces of an egoistic view are present even in the account of friendship."²¹ On the contrary, the Tamil thinker's moral system stresses altruism and the individual's obligations to society too often:

Those that love not appropriate everything to themselves; those that love are prepared to spare even their bones to others (st. 72).

Give to the poor and live with fame; life has no gain other than that (st. 72).

The poor may one day prosper; but those that lack compassion are the most impoverished and will never be redeemed (st. 246).

Aristotle classifies friendship into three types; the noble (*kalon*), sought for its own sake, the pleasant (*hēdy*), that which appeals to the senses and the useful (*hrēsimon*), that which is a means to something else. The friendship of virtue, based on the moral and intellectual qualities possessed and shared by friends, is considered the best by Aristotle. It alone pursues the excellence of friends for what they are and not for what they have. The other two friendships based on accidents of fortune, beauty, withinness and others will not last long. Old people and a few young adults may give top priority to profit whereas a friendship of pleasure may be found mostly among the young that may be carried away by their emotions. In a virtuous friendship age does not matter and it contains the characteristics of utilitarian and hedonistic friendships. The last two are more widely prevalent than the first because fully virtuous men are few. In another classification, Aristotle relates friendship to the government. Each legitimate form of government – kingship, aristocracy, timocracy – involves some kind of friendship because there is a goodwill towards justice in each. The friendship between a king and his subjects consists in the king's superior virtue by which he bestows benefits upon his subjects, who, in turn, honour, respect and obey the king. The father-son friendship in a family is analogous to this. In the friendship between aristocratic rulers and their subjects, which is similar to that between husband and wife, the partner superior in excellence gives more and is, in turn, given more. The citizens who are in control in timocracy are equal, just and virtuous and their friendship is like the friendship among brothers who are almost of the same fortune and upbringing.

Valluvar also prefers the friendship of virtue to any other kind recommending it to the prince as well as to the common man but focuses his attention on discrimination between friendship of the worthy and mean company and defining and identifying false and evil friendship. All the three advantages, virtue, pleasure and utility, are mentioned by him;

Weigh the worth of men of virtue and of mature knowledge and secure their friendship (st. 441).

He emphasizes usefulness when he declares,

Cherish as friends those who can remove present ills and guard you from future ones (st. 442).

True friendship hastens to the rescue of the afflicted as readily as the hand of him whose garment has slipped away (st. 781).

What things are there to gain as friendship? What other armours can equal it as a defence (st. 781).

But usefulness shouldn't be uppermost in the minds of friends:

Mean is the friendship if it proudly declares, "He is so intimate with us and we so much with him" (st. 790).

Friends who calculate their profits, harlots who accept whatever is given and thieves are all alike (st. 813).

The pleasure that one gains from friendship is extra-ordinary. Constant meetings and companionship are not necessary for friendship, it is only the union of hearts that strengthens the bond of friendship:

The more you study good books, the more insights you get into them; the more you cultivate the friendship of the noble, the more delightful it becomes (st. 783).

Friendship is not that which stops at mutual exchange of smiles; it is rather the love that delights the heart (st. 786).

Whereas Valluvar does not insist on frequent meetings between friends, Aristotle says that an active friendship, preferable to what he calls habitual friendship, demands that friends live together, exchange mutual favours, please each other and profit from each other's company. Friends who are separated by geographical distance, may still be habitual friends through their good mutual disposition but long absences will easily break a friendship – one would say "out of sight, out of mind."²² With regard to the friendships to be cultivated by kings also, there is a difference of opinion

between the two thinkers. According to Aristotle, men in power do not look for pleasant friends who are equally good and useful for noble purposes, but they look for the witty to entertain them and for the clever and aggressive to execute their profitable orders.²³ Aristotle seems to have in mind the age-old custom of kings keeping fools and clowns by their side to entertain them. But Valluvar takes pains to drive home the idea that rulers ought to choose wise and bold men as their companions who should be given the right to advise them and even the freedom to chide them when they go wrong.

Who can ruin the man that commands the friendship of those that can reprimand him? (st. 447).

The king that has no support of men that can censure him will perish even in the absence of antagonists (st. 448).

From his master Plato's and his own bitter experiences, Aristotle would have come to the conclusion that kings do not take kindly to such honest and outspoken friends. To him, princes of superior virtue are a rare breed.

Aristotle argues that when there is a wide disparity between friends with regard to their virtue, wealth or social standing, friendship is not possible. Gods exceeding mortal men in virtue cannot be friends with the latter; kings and the common people cannot be friends because of difference in social status and wealth; the wise cannot be friends with men of ordinary virtue. For Aristotle, the least enduring friendship is that between evil men as they possess unsteady characters and their wickedness is hateful even to themselves. On the other hand, the open relationship between good men makes it possible for them to correct each other when they see fault in each other's conduct.

Valluvar is more concerned with the avoidance of mean company and false friends. The high-minded will fear mean men because "just as water assumes the character of the soil on which it flows, the human mind takes the character of the company it keeps" (st. 452). "The friendship of evil men who look as if they would eat you up through excess of love is sweeter in its dying than in its growing" (st. 811). In fact, "solitude is better than the society of those who are like the untrained horses that throw down their riders on the battlefield" (st. 814). But the most dangerous friendship is that of men who look like friends but are enemies at heart. One should fear the hypocritical villains who smile to

the face but nurse hatred within their hearts. “A weapon may lie concealed in the hands that worship; the tears that enemies shed are of the same nature” (st. 828).

Listing goodwill (*eunoia*), concord (*homonoia*) and beneficence (*euergesia*) as the basic sentiments of friendly love, Aristotle says that goodwill is only the beginning of friendship but not full-fledged friendship. Time, intensity and familiarity can alone turn goodwill into active love for one’s friend. Explaining concord as the mutuality of feeling and thinking between individuals, he analyzes the concord among citizens within their state. Benefactors, he argues, love those they have benefited more than their beneficiaries love them. The reasons that he gives for this apparent paradox are quite interesting:

This is what happens with craftsmen too; every man loves his own handiwork better than he would be loved by it if it came alive; and this happens perhaps most of all with poets; for they have an excessive love for their poems, doting on them as if they were their children. This is what the position of benefactors is like; for that which they have treated well is their handiwork, and therefore they love this more than the handiwork does its maker. ²⁴

One takes time to test the fitness of others for friendship. There is nothing wrong if one is slow to fall into friendship because once a friendship is formed there is no question of terminating it on flimsy grounds. Both Aristotle and Valluvar, therefore, speak of firm and constant friendship and address the question of dissolution of friendship. For Aristotle, intimate friendship consists in the mutual sharing of goods, according to the known proverb that “friends’ goods are common property”. ²⁵ Complaints never occur between such friends. A good man should have a sympathetic consciousness (*Synaisthanesthai*) of his friend’s sensation and thought. The sympathetic consciousness may be enriched in the best way by conversing and living together and by sharing their thoughts and feelings. This intellectual communion is more important than anything else.

He needs, therefore, to be conscious of the existence of his friends as well, and this will be realized in their living together and sharing their discussion and thought: for this is what living together would seem to mean in the case of man, and not, as in the case of cattle, feeding in the same place. ²⁶

Friendship based upon utility and pleasure are broken as soon as the partners are found to be useless or unpleasant. With regard to the breaking

of virtuous friendship, one has to be extremely considerate. When a man is chosen as a friend, the friendship may be dissolved only if his wickedness is incurable. If there is a chance that his character may be reformed, then it is good to make an attempt in that line before taking any drastic step.

The Tamil poet grows eloquent over the salient features of intimate friendship: That friendship is called intimacy which cannot be injured by the liberties taken by the loved one. The right of intimacy is part of friendship: to be pleased with such a right is the duty of the wise. Of what avail is long-standing friendship if it doesn't approve of the actions done through the right of intimacy?

If friends, by right of intimacy, do a thing without being asked, the warm-hearted will be pleased with them on account of its desirability (st.804).

Those who know the virtue of genuine friendship will not give up the intimacy of long-standing friends even if the latter may cause their ruin. The world loves those that never forsake their friends but love them with a deathless affection. Valluvar praises the virtuous that never alter in their affection for their old friends. But when some friendship is discovered to be evil or false, one need not hesitate to terminate it.

Abandon silently and little by little the friendship of those who make much of what little they can do for you (st. 818).

When your foes affect friendship, wear a smiling face but keep them off from your heart (st. 830).

Though with regard to the nature of friendship and its type there are certain striking similarities between the views of Aristotle and Valluvar, there is a gulf of difference between them where the method of enquiry and the manner of presentation are concerned. Emphasizing the view that the method of enquiry in the *Ethics* and the *Politics* has to be different from that in disciplines such as *Metaphysics* and *Mathematics*, Aristotle himself says,

For it is the mark of an educated mind to expect that amount of exactness in each kind which the nature of the particular subject admits. ²⁷

In the *Ethics*, the method is neither completely dialectical, based upon mere opinions of others, nor highly scientific, based upon absolute premises. Here what he aims at are not essential attributes and absolute truths as in Philosophy or Mathematics but general or universal rules of conduct. He does not indulge in casuistry but studies ethical questions from the

viewpoint that is universally valid. As has been pointed out by Greek scholars, the great principles of teleology, intellectualism and eudemonism are woven into his entire ethical study. Aristotle is primarily concerned with studying human nature as it is. The major aim of the *Ethics* is not to preach or to convert or to persuade but to analyze and to investigate the subject of human experience to universal judgment. If in Plato there is more of prescription than description, the two are to be found in different proportion in Aristotle.

Valluvar is also interested in general and universal rules of conduct and almost always arrives at conclusions that are not particular to his time but valid and lasting for all time. His method is to define every virtue precisely, explain its merits elaborately and to advocate it forcefully. He persuades men to pursue the path of righteousness by appealing to them earnestly, by commanding them solemnly, by wheedling them into agreeing, by pleading with them effectively, by promising them with immediate rewards, by frightening them into submission or by threatening them with dire consequences. Relying as much on logical reasoning as on emotional appeal, he presents his ideas as time-tested and approved by generations of wise men. The readers hear the voice of an affectionate mother, of a well-meaning father, of a wise statesman, of an eloquent orator or a commanding lawmaker. There are more prescriptions than descriptions in *Tirukkural* but they are in the form of moving appeals or veiled threats. The reader is finally left with the impression that virtue triumphs over everything and that vice is repulsive.

Aristotle's style, admirably lucid and concise, fits the subject matter and objective of the *Ethics*. But it is completely devoid of literary polish, excepting for the occasional use of similes and proverbs. Plato's *Dialogues* have been hailed as poems though Plato himself banishes poetry out of his ideal republic. Conspicuously differing from his mentor, Aristotle shows the least interest in poetic expression. This does not in anyway detract from the clarity he aims at though on a very limited number of occasions obscurity is caused by too great an economy of expression. Aristotle's critics have drawn our attention to certain other limitations like repetitions, digressions and exercises in hairsplitting. The reader will be extremely grateful to Aristotle for clear expositions of complex subjects but he may at times long for aesthetic pleasure.

Tirukkural is at once a moral treatise and a work of art of the highest

order. It employs throughout a single metre, the Kuralvenpā which, because of Valluvar's spectacular success, appears to be perfectly suited to gnomic poetry. The first line of every couplet consists of four feet and the second of three; only feet of two or three metric units (acai) are used. This tight structure doesn't exercise a brake on Valluvar's imagination or prevent him from using profusely common as well as rare literary devices. As V.V.S. Aiyar rightly observes,

The ability with which the poet manages the caesura in these short verses is something masterly. It is within the compass of these seven feet that our author has compressed some of the profoundest thoughts that have ever been uttered by man. And how like a master he plays on this tiny instrument! Sparkling wit and humour, the pointed statement, fancy, irony, the native question, the picturesque simile, there is not one of these and others of the thousand tricks that our author has not employed in this perfect master-piece of art. ²⁸

Because of Valluvar's predilection for concise expression, we come across a few obscure passages that have been variously interpreted by his commentators. But, on the whole, the literary excellence of *Tirukkural* rivals the grandeur of its philosophy.

This kind of analytical study of the views of Aristotle and Valluvar on friendship enlightens us on one more vital issue. Some of Aristotle's commentators have expressed their surprise at finding two whole books of the *Nicomachean Ethics* devoted to the subject of friendship. There are those who have tended to treat them as a digression in a work that addresses the question of human morality. But the knowledge that another ancient philosopher living in a distant corner of the Orient was also considerably exercised by problems relating to friendship and chose to deal with it in as many as six chapters may force the readers of the *Ethics* to have a rethinking on their hasty conclusion about the two books.

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15. PAḶAMOLI NĀNŪRU: PROVERBS AS EQUIPMENT FOR LIVING

In an insightful and far-reaching discussion of proverbs in an essay entitled "Literature as Equipment for Living", Kenneth Burke, often compared to Coleridge for the wide range of his critical output, convincingly substantiates the view that the most complex and sophisticated works of art could be considered "somewhat as proverbs writ large":

Proverbs are strategies for dealing with situations. Insofar as situations are typical and recurrent in a given social structure, people develop names for them and strategies for handling them. Another name for strategies might be attitudes (Burke 944).

If, in his view, works of art are strategic naming of situations, sociological criticism should aim at codifying the various strategies which artists have developed with relation to the naming of situations. Proposing a method of classification based on social strategies, Burke contends that the unique merit of this system is that it can cut across previously established disciplines. His sociological criticism, making a liberal use of Marxism and anthropological studies of myth and ritual, is concerned with art as a social act as well as with aesthetic questions.

Drawing our attention to random specimens in the *Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*, Burke demonstrates that there is neither "pure literature" not "realism for its own sake" in proverbs:

Everything is medicine. Proverbs are designed for consolation or vengeance, for admonition or exhortation, for foretelling. Or they name typical, recurrent situations.

There is realism for promise, admonition, solace, vengeance, foretelling, instruction, charting, all for the direct bearing that such acts have upon matters of welfare (Burke 943-944).

He illustrates the various categories with a few representative examples:

Proverbs designed for consolation:

"The sun does not shine on both sides of the hedge at once." "Think of ease, but work on." "Little troubles the eye, but far less the soul."

"The worst luck now, the better another time".

"He that hath lands hath quarrels." "He knows how to carry the dead cock home." "He is not poor that hath little, but he that desireth much."

For vengeance:

"At length the fox is brought to the terrier." "Shod in the cradle, barefoot in the stubble." "Sue a beggar and get a house." "The higher the ape goes, the more he shows his tail." "The moon does not need the barking of dogs." "He measures another's corn by his own bushel." "He shuns the man who knows him well." "Fools tie knots and wise men loosen them."

Proverbs that have to do with foretelling:

"Sow peas and beans in the wane of the moon, who soweth them sooner, he soweth too soon." "When the wind's in the north, the skillful fisher goes not forth." "When the sloe tree is as white as a sheet, sow your barley whether it be dry or wet." "When the sun sets bright and clear, an easterly wind you need not fear. When the sun sets in a bank, a westerly wind we shall not want."

"When the moon's in the full, then wit's in the want." "Straws show which way the wind blows." "When the fish is cast, the net is laid aside." "Remove an old tree and it will wither to death." "The wolf may lose his teeth, but never his nature."

"He that bites on every weed must needs light on poison."

"Whether the pitcher strikes the stone, or the stone strikes the pitcher, it is bad for the pitcher." "Eagles catch no flies." "The more laws, the more offenders."

"First thrive and then wive." "Think with the wise, but talk with the vulgar." "When the fox preacheth, then beware your geese." "Venture a small fish to catch a great one." "Respect a man, he will do the more."

Typical, recurrent situations:

"Sweet appears sour when we pay"

"The treason is loved but the traitor is hated." "The wine in the bottle does not quench thirst." "The sun is never the worse for shining on a dunghill." "The lion kicked by an ass." "The lion's share." "To catch one napping." "To smell rat." "To cool one's heels." (Burke 943-944)

Such an analysis of proverbs leads Burke on to the conclusion that literature may be treated from the standpoint of situations and strategies

and that works of art may be approached as strategies for selecting enemies and allies, for socializing losses, for warding off evil eye, for purification, propitiation and desanctification, consolation and vengeance, admonition and exhortation, implicit commands or instructions of one sort or another and that literary forms like “tragedy” or “comedy” or “satire” may be viewed as equipments for living (Burke 947).

The Tamils, one of the most ancient communities of the world, can justly be proud of a repertory of proverbs which touch upon all aspects of human life. There is no life experience which they do not speak of. Every group of men and women from the most foolish to the wisest can benefit by them as one proverb or the other will come to their rescue when they are in a tight corner or on the horns of a dilemma. The whole spectrum of human thought on subjects ranging from sensuous pleasures to spirituality, from the basic needs like food, dress, shelter and sleep to the most advanced philosophical notions is covered by them in a style and manner that will appeal to the elite as well as to the mob. The rich experience of the Tamil community and its culture are gloriously reflected in them. They also fruitfully lend themselves to the classification advocated by Kenneth Burke.

Proverbs designed for consolation:

yāṇaikkū oru kālam vantāl pūṇaikkū oru kālam varum

If there is a time for the elephant, there will be a time for the cat.

muppatu varuṭam vāḷntavanum illai, muppatu varuṭam tāḷntavanum illai

None has enjoyed prosperity for thirty years: none has suffered from poverty for thirty years.

tikkarravarkkut teyvamē tuṇai

God is the only refuge to those that have no human help.

eḷiyārai valiyār aṭittāl valiyārait teyvam aṭikkum

If the mighty ill-treat the weak, God will punish the mighty.

For Vengeance

muṟpakal ceyyiṇ piṟpakal viḷaiyum

If you do wrong in the morning, you will reap the consequences in the evening.

tiṇai vitaittavan tiṇai aruppāṇ: viṇai vitaittavan viṇai aruppāṇ

The one that sows millet will reap millet. The one that does wicked deeds will meet with bad ends.

aracan anru kollum, teyvam niṇru kollum

The king's punishment is instant; the god's punishment takes time.

Proverbs that have to do with foretelling:

kārruḷlapōtē tūrrikkol

When the wind is favourable, do the winnowing.

uḷukiṇra kalattil ūvalipōnāl aruvaṭaikkālattil āḷ tēṭa vēṇtā

If you have labourers on your side during the days of ploughing, you need not go in search of men during the days of harvesting.

karaippār karaittāl kallum karaiyum

If the capable ones try, even stones will melt.

erumpu ūrak kal tēyum

A stone will get eroded if ants keep moving on it.

Typical recurrent situations:

niḷalin arumai veyilil teriyum

The rare benefit of the shade will be realized in the heat.

muḷḷai muḷḷāl eṭu

Remove a thorn by another.

erivatai iluttāl kotippatu aṭaṅkum

If you withdraw what burns, you can control what boils.

pāmpin kāl pāmpu ariyum

The snake alone knows the snake's feet.

nūḷalum taṇ vāyāl keṭum

The frog will come to grief by its own croaking.

nāy vālai nimirtta muṭiyātu

The dog's tail cannot be straightened.

kollan teruvil ūci virpārillai

None will sell needles in a blacksmith's street.

pūvōṭu nār cērntārpola

Just like the thread that has joined the flowers.

koḷi mitittukkuṇcu muṭam ākātu

The young one does not become lame because the mother-hen steps on it.

In all these proverbs, it will be glaringly evident that there is stark realism not for the sake of realism but to encourage, console, reprimand, chastise and teach.

Burke rightly observes that his approach suggests a necessary modification to the common criticism that there are contrary proverbs.

The apparent contradictions depend upon differences in attitude, involving a correspondingly different choice of strategy. Consider, for instance, the apparently opposite pair. "Repentance comes too late" and "Never too late to mend". The first is admonitory. It says in effect: "You'd better look out or you'll get yourself too far into this business." The second is consolatory, saying in effect "Buck up, old man, you can still pull out of this" (Burke 944).

Burke's explanation is valid in the case of Tamil proverbs also. The following are the apparently opposite pairs that will immediately come to mind.

avaṇaṇṇi ōraṇuvum acaiyātu

Not even a single atom will move without His decision.

taṇ kaiyē taṇakkutavi

Your hand is your only help.

ellām talai viti

Everything depends on fate.

vitiyai matiyāl vellalām

With one's mind one can conquer fate.

It is to be noted that Burke's insight marvelously accounts for the seeming contradictions in *Tirukkural*, the best of didactic works.

1. Is there anything mightier than fate? Even if one thinks of overcoming it by some strategy, it will prevail.(380)
Those who strive hard without yielding to despair will overthrow even fate. (620)
2. Excepting in ways ordained by the Ordainer, even to those who have gathered crores, enjoying them is hard to achieve (377).
Though an attempt may fail because of divine decree, perseverance will pay the wages for the hard work done (619).
3. When a time comes for foes to feign friendship, show friendship in the face removing it from the heart and then abandon it altogether (830).

Let not a man be false to his heart: if he does it, his heart itself will later burn him (293).

In all these three pairs of couplets and in a few more, the overt contradictions depend upon differences in situations.

When Burke claims that proverbs as literature in miniature have medicinal value, we are reminded of the wisdom of our ancestors who gave their didactic writings names of medicines like *Tirikaṭukam*, *Cirupañcamūlam* and *Ēlāti*. However, he warns the readers against taking seriously naturalistic writings which pursuing realism as an end in itself give a photographic description of the seamy side of life. One should also be wary of what Burke calls “inspirational works.”

We usually take it for granted that people who consume our current output of books on “How to Buy Friends and Bamboozle Oneself and other People” read them and will attempt applying the recipes given. Nothing of the sort. The reading of a book on the attaining of success is in itself the symbolic attaining of that success.... The lure of the book resides in the fact that the reader, while reading it, is then living in the aura of success. What he wants is easy success: and he gets it in symbolic form by the mere reading itself...

As a way of sizing things up, the naturalistic tradition tends to become as inaccurate as the “inspirational” strategy, though at the opposite extreme (Burke 945).

The age-old Tamil community giving more importance to serious didactic works than any other in India or abroad seems to have been fully aware of the value of proverbs as equipment for living. Proverbs were given their due place and recognition as early as *Tolkāppiyam*, which defines the name and nature of a proverb while discussing various literary forms:

Subtlety, sharpness, brevity, brilliance and good sense should characterize proverbs which, in a simple style, should logically treat the subject taken (*Tolkāppiyam* 1443).

It is evident that Tolkāppiyar perceives in a proverb almost all the qualities of a literary piece though in prose.

The great Sangam poets, known for their complex, subtle and densely textured compositions, did not fight shy of incorporating apt proverbs into their masterpieces:

*amma vāli tōli immai
nanru cey maruṅkil tītu il eṇṇum
tonru paṭu moli inru poyttanru kol*

Long live, my friend! Does the old saying, ‘if you do good now, you will face no harm later’, go wrong today?

This Akam poem quoting a proverb to prove its point adds that old sayings continue to be valid and relevant even long after they came into being.

It is remarkable that a poet of considerable antiquity like Munrurai Araiyanār conceived a collection of four hundred poems, each weaving into its text a proverb witnessing to the wisdom of the ancients. Some of these proverbs serve as explanations of the point enunciated, some as illustrative examples and some more provide functional similes. Whatever may be the kind of the proverb, it becomes an integral part of the poem and reveals its meaning in a flash. Contradicting proverbs do make their appearance but with proper explanations. One poem (Paḷamoli 204) contends that even a man known for his intellectual attainments may commit mistakes since destiny may destroy intellect. In another poem (Paḷamoli 220), the one that does not venture to do great deeds because of fear of fate is condemned as a fool. The two proverbs “arivinaī ūlē aṭum” and “arivaccam ārrapperitu” are presented here in such an interpretative way that the contradiction is ironed out. One piece (Paḷamoli 127) argues that when fate is favourable no efforts are required to make money whereas all efforts will be in vain when it is unpropitious. Another piece (Paḷamoli 161) exhorts men not to get frustrated deciding that they have none to help them but to undesperingly work hard since rewards are certain to reach them.

While going through these poems, one is struck by the revelation that the formidable Vaḷḷuvar might have been indebted to some of these proverbs for his couplets in the chapter called “Fate.” Munrurai Araiyanār’s Paḷamoli nānūru came much later than Tirukkuraḷ but these proverbs could have been in currency during Vaḷḷuvar’s time. The latter has struck gold out of these and a close study of his couplets vis-à-vis the corresponding proverbs will be a lesson in poetry-making. The following Kuraḷs, for instance, are poetic renderings of the ideas mentioned in the proverbs on destiny:

Determination will be born of fortune-making destiny.

Indolence will be born of adverse destiny (*Kuraḷ* 371).

Malignant fate will stupefy one's intelligence: benignant fate will enrich one's intelligence (*Kuraḷ* 372).

Even if one learns many abstruse works, one's innate intelligence will only prevail (*Kuraḷ* 373).

Because of the reign of destiny, all factors favourable to acquiring of wealth may turn unfavourable and all factors unfavourable may turn favourable (*Kuraḷ* 375).

What is not one's pre-ordained property will not stay even if well guarded; What is one's own will not leave even if thrown out (*Kuraḷ* 376).

Valluvar's observations on fate culled out from proverbs and converted into great poetry culminate in a message characteristic of his vision of life. Why should those that enjoy the pleasure of life when fate is favourable feel miserable when things go awry? (*Kuraḷ* 379).

Not only Valluvar but later Tamil poets also realized the potential poetic value of proverbs and capitalized on that. There was a proverb which, based on a typical recurrent situation, stated that none would welcome death calling it from behind: *kūrṛam kommai koṭṭināril*. Munṛurai Araiyanār used it to warn people against inviting trouble by incurring the wrath of great men. It is prudent to learn a lesson from the life of the mighty giant, who, not knowing this, died in a battle (*Paḷamoli* 126). Tiruttakka tēvar, well-versed in the art of making his own what he borrowed from his Tamil ancestors, especially Caṅkam poets, did not eschew proverbs. Adding a new dimension to the proverb and placing it in the proper context, he is able to evoke the feelings of pathos and anger. When the hero of *Cīvaka Cintāmaṇi* is imprisoned, the heart-broken women give vent to their sorrow and indignation by invoking the god of death in a picturesque description modeled on the proverb:

nōrṛilār makalirenṇār nonkantīr tōḷkaḷenṇār
kūrṛattaik kommai koṭṭik kulattoṭu muṭiyumenṇār
 (cīvaka cintāmaṇi*1109)

The author of *Paḷamoli Nanūru*, tapping all available resources, resorts to proverbs even when he requires similes that can serve the twin aims of

illustration and ornamentation. The proverb *aṇiyelām ātaiyinpiṇ* (Dress has to be privileged over all ornaments) is employed in *Paḷamoli* 271 to drive home the point that knowledge has to take precedence over all kinds of wealth.

Since there is “God’s plenty”, the poet can bring in even two proverbs as similes in some poems. The proverb, *curam pōkki ulaku koṇṭār illai*, means that when a man has crossed the path, it is difficult to collect toll from him; *marampōkkik kūli koṇṭār illai* means that when a man has reached the shore by boat, it is not easy to collect from him the wages due to the boatman. These two old proverbs come handy to Araiyanār to tell people that if one does not study during youth, one cannot hope to do it during old age (*Paḷamoli* 60).

Great poets like Kalidasa have compared the king’s collecting taxes from citizens to the bees’ sucking honey from flowers as in both cases what is got without inflicting any pain is used ultimately to benefit the source. To one’s utter surprise, one learns that this is a proverb that might have been in vogue several centuries ago:

Poruttam aḷiyāta pūntaṇṭār manṇar
Aruttam aṭiṇiḷalārai varuttātu
Koṇṭārum pōlātē kōṭal atuvanrō
Vanṭu tātuṇṭu viṭal

(*Paḷamoli* 242)

Folk knowledge and culture as enshrined in proverbs can very often put to shame not only poets and scholars but philosophers and scientists also. One that hears a drum beating feels that it echoes the words one has in mind. There is a rare proverb which expresses this idea. Araiyanār observes that this is similar to the fact that even very learned men will not be able to free a foolish man’s mind from the wrong notions that he cherishes. The drum echoing the words one thinks of is a classic example of Freud’s projection theory which might not have occurred to the great psychologist himself.

During the Bhakti Movement which caused a resurgence of poetic activity, great saint-poets like Campantar, Appar, Cuntarar and Mānikkavācakar found in folklore a valuable resource which they could tap with remarkable success. In the fourth book of the saivite canon, Appar has a decade of stanzas called *Paḷamolippatikam* which uses ten proverbs as similes of an everlasting appeal. In all these, he regrets his early adherence to Jainism in preference to Saivism.

He uses “kaṇiyiruppak kāy kavartal” to stress the point that his becoming a Jain in the hope of getting release from the bondage of life was like stealing unripe fruits while ripe ones were freely available. When it was easy to follow the path of Saivism, he chose the difficult road of Jainism which would not take him anywhere. And that was similar to (muyal viṭṭuk kākkaippin pōtal), leaving the rabbit and going behind the crow. When Lord Siva was ready to offer him shelter, he foolishly sought the feet of Arukan, the Jain god without realizing that it was (aṛamirukka maṛam vilaikkukkoḷḷal), paying a heavy price for evil while virtue is available free of charge. His expectation that Jainism would redeem him was as stupid as (paṇi nīrāl pāvai ceyappāvittal), the attempt to make a doll out of snowflakes. He wandered in the company of wicked people without willingly providing a place for the Lord in his body. It was a case of (ētan pōrkkū ātan akappaṭal), Ātan getting caught in the war of Ētan. Besides studying the false scriptures, he never meditated on the true god. That reminds him of (iruṭṭaraiyil malaṭu kaṛattal), milking a barren cow in a dark room. As he was once leading a shameful life, he become an object of ridicule. He now understands that it was (viḷakkirukka miṇmiṇitikkāyṭal), seeking warmth from luminous beetles, when there is a lamp with which a fire can be readily lit. The deceitful life of a Jain monk, who is unable to identify the real source of salvation is like (pālūril payikkam pukal), begging in a wasteland. When one doesn’t approach the lord who destroys evil, what one does is (tavamirukka avam ceytal), doing the opposite of penance, when undertaking penance is feasible. Forgetting the Lord that saved the other gods by drinking poison is as idiotic as (karumpirukka irumpu kaṭittal), biting iron when sugarcane is within one’s reach.

But for Munrurai Araiyanār and Appar, some of these proverbs would have been lost forever. Their poems constitute a unique literary phenomenon celebrating folk wisdom.

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16. DESTINY IN *ANTIGONE* AND *CILAPPATIKĀRAM*

It is not unreasonable to assume that Greece and Tamilnadu which had trade relations in the distant past would have exchanged ideas, though it is now almost impossible to precisely define the nature of the impact of Greek and Tamil thought on each other and to speculate on who borrowed from whom even where we may identify striking similarities. In the caṅkam works, there are references to the Indian contact and the goods imported from the West. The Ionians who had their settlements in Tamilnadu called *Yavaṇar irukkai* like the one discovered at Arecamedu might have introduced the words *ōrai* (hour) and *mattikai* (whip) into Tamil. *Cilappatikāram* itself mentions:

To the sworded yavaṇā soldiers strong skilled in guarding the gates of the ramparts rising high¹

It is also said that the deadly weapons on the fortress of Maturai were similar to the ones Archimedes invented. It is a pity that when there had been so much of contact between the two great civilizations of the world, no convincing evidence of the Tamils' acquaintance with Greek literature can be traced now.

Sophocles' *Antigone* was writtirn in the fifth century B.C., "that golden age of truth and beauty which was Greece".² Western poets, philosophers and scholars have hailed *Antigone* as the finest of Greek tragedies, as a work of art nearer to perfection than any other produced by the human spirit. To many of them, Sophocles remains "the veritable summit of dramatic art"³ and the fact that *Antigone* has managed to live for more than two millennia through translations, adaptations and reworkings inviting a plethora of critical articles and books bears out the truth of the statement. It is the matchless myth that has germinated into the tragedy, the portrayal of the woman protagonist Antigone, the exquisite choral odes in the play and Sophocles' vision of life that have immortalized it.

Ilaṅko Aṭikaḷ's *Cilappatikāram* does challenge comparison with the

best literary works of the world. If it cannot boast of so much of international acclaim it is merely because the tragic epic is written in a language that does not enjoy the patronage and prestige of any of the western tongues. Ilaṅko Aṭikal's architectonic skill, the Olympian detachment with which he narrates the breathtaking events of the epic, the stylistic variations he adopts for the variety of incidents of the 30 kātais (sections), the subtle use of folk songs prevalent in his days, the prominence he has given the commoners, and the realistic portrayal of the life of the Tamils in the second century A.D. can justly claim the highest praise due to a *magnum opus*.

Though the two works written at different times in two different languages do not have strikingly similar plots, there are certain unmistakable resemblances which, when studied closely, yield fresh insights into the working of the minds of the two great artists as well as into the two societies they belong to. We do not come across many common occurrences. Antigone is the daughter of the accursed Oedipus who unwittingly killed his father and married his own mother. Her two brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices, quarrelled with each other; the latter was driven out but returned to assault their own kingdom, Thebes. In the battle they killed each other and Creon became king. When the play opens he orders that Polyneices should be left unburied on the battlefield as a traitor. Antigone cannot bear this insult to her dead brother, makes bold to bury him and incurs the wrath of the king who mercilessly decrees that she should be buried alive in a vault of stone even though she happens to be his son Haimon's bride. Tiresias, the blind prophet, warns the ruler that if he does not withdraw his orders, he will have "to pay back corpse for corpse, flesh of your own flesh".⁴ When the chorus of old men also supporting the prophet appeals to Creon to free Antigone from her vault and build a tomb for the body of Polyneices, he gives in and rushes to bury the body. Meanwhile, Antigone makes a noose of her veil and hangs herself. Haimon laments, lying beside her when Creon reaches him. But the son, after a vain attempt to strike his father, kills himself. His mother Eurydice, unable to bear the grief, stabs herself to death cursing her husband. Creon's agony knows no bounds when he realizes that he had been rash and foolish.

Though *Cilapatikāram* deals with as serious and as tragic a happening as the Greek play, its final scene is not death-crowded. Tragic endings being unpalatable to the Tamil temperament, the epic ends on a happy note. Kōvalaṇ meets with a cruel death unjustly condemned by the Pandya

king as a thief; his wife Kaṇṇaki wreaks vengeance upon the ruler and his capital by first revealing the folly of the king and then reducing the city to ashes by the power of her chastity. In the end she is deified and the Chera king builds a temple for her while his brother enshrines her in an immortal epic. The encounter between Kaṇṇaki and the Pandya king reminds us of the Creon-Antigone clash, as the two scenes effectively symbolize the age-old conflict between the state and the individual.

The two women characters have become archetypes, one of chastity and the other of sisterly love. Antigone, who sacrifices her life fighting for honourable burial for her brother, is praised as the most sisterly of souls, as the very incarnation of sisterhood. Shelley wrote to one of his friends:

You are right about Antigone, how sublime a picture of woman!... Some of us have in a prior existence been in love with Antigone, and that makes us find no full content in any mortal tie.⁵

In the case of the Tamil heroine, the epic was written after the apotheosis had begun.

The lyrical complaints of Antigone and Kaṇṇaki at the most tragic moment of their lives are heart-rending. When Antigone is to be entombed, she cries:

O Thebes

O men many charioted, in love with fortune,
Dear springs of Dirce, sacred Theban grove,
Be witness for me, denied all pity,
Unjustly judged! And think a word of love
For her whose path turns
Under dark earth, where there are no more tears.
(L1. 682-88)

And yet, as men's hearts know, I have done no wrong,
I have not sinned before God. Or if I have,
I shall know the truth in death.
(L1. 722-24)

But she is unable to win the sympathy of Creon and even the chorus feels that she is also partly to blame for what had befallen her.

Kaṇṇaki's lamentations, on the other hand, move even the stoniest of hearts:

Are there women? Are there women?
 With the mind that can stand their spouses'
 miseries?
 Are there women? Are there women?

Are there men? Are there men?
 Ready to rear the infants born of others
 Are there men? Are there men?

Are there gods? Are there gods?
 In Kūṭal of the king whose sword did a cruel deed
 Are there gods? Are there gods?
 (XIX, LI. 51-59)

Till the end, Antigone is not prepared to understand her opponent's point of view or plight and unfortunately dies before the king repents his sinful deed. Her vengeful nature is freely displayed:

But if the guilt
 Lies upon Creon who judged me, then, I pray,
 May his punishments equal mine. (LI. 724-26)

We have to remember that anger and the desire for revenge were considered noble passions by the ancient Greek society. Kaṇṇaki also thirsts for revenge immediately after the murder of her husband. She is even proud of having caused the death of the Pandya king and unmindful of the agony of Kōpperuntēvi, the dying wife of the late king, mercilessly declares:

If in truth I am a woman chaste
 I won't relent but raze Maturai with the monarch!
 You will witness my spirit vengeful! (XXI, LI. 36-39)

But at the end, when she makes her final appearance, she seems to have forgiven the king completely and accepted him as her father:

The Pandya king is not guilty:
 In Indra's palace, a welcome guest he is:
 I am his daughter. (XXVIII, LI. 7-8)

Valluvar had already taught the Tamils that forgiving the enemy and

forgetting the wrong done to one are far more commendable than planning revenge and harboring ill-will.

From the portrayal of these two women in two different cultural settings, we can draw certain valid inferences about the state of women in the ancient Greek and Tamil societies. Though little is known about the place of women in classical Greek sensibility, writers such as Aristotle and Thucydides have nothing but contempt for women's spirituality or aptness for public life. But Greek tragedies present a galaxy of women matchless for their truth and variety. The pictures of Clytemnestra, Electra, Antigone, Ismene, Hecuba, Andromache, Helen, Phaedra, Medea, and Alcestis (that we get in them) reveal compassionate insights into the condition of womanhood. Perhaps, the great Greek tragedies wanted to compensate for the injustice done to their women in everyday life. But we do get glimpses of the inferior position accorded to women in the Greek society.

Ismene: Our own death would be if we should go against Creon
And do what he has forbidden! We are only women,
We cannot fight with men, Antigone! (L1. 45-47)

When Haimon pleads with Creon to spare the life of his bride, Antigone, the king contemptuously dismisses the request:

So you are right
Not to lose your head over this woman
Your pleasure with her would soon grow cold,
Haimon,
And then you would have a hellcat in bed and elsewhere.
Let her find her husband in Hell! (L1. 511-15)

And he later proudly adds:

If we must lose,
Let us lose to a man, at least! Is a woman stronger than we?
(L1. 539-40)

Iḷaṅko Aṭikaḷ's Tamil society must have been guilty of the same crime. In spite of the loud protests of enlightened souls like Tiruvalluvar, prostitution continued to flourish in the Tamil society and the poets glorifying womanhood were perhaps giving expression to their guilt feelings

or paying lip-service to the cause of women. But Iḷaṅkō Aṭikaḷ's genuine concern is evident in his realistic representation of the treatment of women like Kaṇṇaki and Mātavi by Kōvalan supposed to be a cultured being. The wide prevalence of unchecked prostitution was a blot on both the societies which could boast of great women intellectuals at the dawn of civilization. The Greek society had already started permitting widow remarriage. A passage in *Antigone*, looked upon as a blemish by Goethe, makes this clear. *Antigone* justifying her fight on behalf of her brother argues:

A husband dead, another can be found:
A child replaced; but once a brother's lost
(Mother and father dead and buried too)
No other brother can be born or grows again.⁶

But the Tamil society which tolerated polygamy and prostitution subjected the widows to inhuman cruelties. Kōpperuntēvi has to sulk in silence when her husband ignoring her presence looks longingly at the dancing women. Iḷaṅkō highlights the unfair discrimination when he describes the ending of the queen:

Stating that no substitute can be shown to a
woman widowed she fell down at the feet with
folded hands.(XX, L1. 80-81)

It is their own views of destiny whose dominance is felt throughout that justify the juxtaposing of *Antigone* and *Cilappatikāram*. The Greek tragic poets made effective use of two religious concepts, the curse and the familial inheritance of a curse. But this thinking was later modified into a belief that divine punishment might fall not on the wicked man himself but on his children and descendants. Judaism believed in Jehovah's visitations of the sins of the fathers upon the children into the third and the fourth generations. Those who found this doctrine objectionable as it entailed the infliction of suffering on innocent individuals propounded that the individual's soul is rewarded or punished in the afterlife according to his conduct on earth. But Greek myths and tragedies portray courage and bloodshed in successive generations of the same family as they seem to accept the faith in inherited punishment. They contain no reference to judgment of the soul after death. The Hindus, the Jains and the Buddhists, on the other hand, believing as they do in a cycle of births, contend that a human being stands or falls by what he or she has done in the previous birth.

The Greek play opens with a reference to the inheritance of a curse:

Antigone: Ismene, dear sister,
You would think that we had already suffered enough
For the curse on Oedipus. (L1. 1-3)

Later, it is made clear in the dialogue between the chorus and Antigone:

Chorus: You have passed beyond human daring and come at last
Into a place of stone where Justice sits.

Antigone: You have touched it at last: that bridal bed
Unspeakable, horror of son and mother mingling
Their crime, infection of all our family!
O Oedipus, father and brother!
Your marriage strikes from the grave to murder mine.
I have been a stranger here in my own land:
All my life:
The blasphemy of my birth has followed me. (L1. 693-700)

But this is not all. The uncanny power of fate is mentioned again and again. The leader of the chorus asks:

What are the new complexities
That shifting Fate has woven for him? (L1. 131-32)

After his bitter experience, Creon acknowledges the power of fate:

I will not fight with destiny. (L1. 873)

The laws of the gods are mighty, and a man must serve them
To the last day of his life! (L1. 879-80)

The messenger who announces the deaths of Haimon and Antigone speaks of the mysterious role of Fate:

I cannot say
Of any condition of human life "This is fixed,
This is clearly good or bad." Fate raises up,
And Fate casts down the happy and unhappy alike;
No man can foretell his Fate. (L1. 902-906)

The Greeks seem to be certain that pride, power, wealth, ambition and even excessive happiness will invite divine wrath and punishment:

Choragos:

For God hates utterly

The bray of bragging tongues:

And when he beheld their smiling,

Their swagger of golden helms,

The frown of his thunder blasted

Their first man from our walls. (L1. 105-10)

No pride on earth is free of the curse of heaven.

Fate works most for woe

With folly's fairest show,

Man's little pleasure is the spring of sorrow (L1. 490-492)

This does not mean that human beings are not responsible for what they do. Fate may play a great role in bringing about the downfall of the tragic hero. But the chief characters may be found to be the creators of their own tragedy.

The chorus tells Antigone:

You have made your choice

Your death is the doing of your conscious hand.

(L1. 703-04)

Tiresias admonishes Creon for having caused his own ruin:

I tell you, Creon, you yourself have brought

This new calamity upon us..... (L1. 796-97)

The only crime is pride. (L1. 806)

The final lesson that these characters have to learn is that since "no power in wealth or war or tough sea-blackened ships can prevail against untiring destiny",

There is no happiness there where there is no wisdom,

No wisdom but in submission to the gods. (L1. 1039-40)

Cilappatikāram abounds in references to curse and fate. The three lessons that the epic wants to teach are stated explicitly in the Patikam:

Dharma will ruin the rulers unruly;

The great will praise the women famed for chastity:

Destiny will be out on time to do its deed. (L1. 55-57.)

After Kaṇṇaki destroys the city of Maturai, she is informed of the curse on her and her husband by Maturāpātiteyvam. There is no point in her blaming the king because in his previous birth, Kōvalaṇ committed the sin of framing a false charge against an innocent businessman and getting him killed by the king. This treacherous deed led to the curse by Caṅkamaṇ's wife, Nīli.

May all those who caused us this grief
Be afflicted with grief of like degree.
(XXIII, Ll. 167-68)

Almost every character in *Cilappatikāram* speaks of the might of fate. And the poet never fails to draw our attention to the role of fate while mentioning a moment of crisis. If , having listened to the song by Mātavi, Kōvalaṇ experiences a sudden transformation, it is because of fate:

Feeling the force of his fate,
he relaxed the grip of his hand
That had embraced
the full-moon-faced lady.(VII, Ll. 54-55)

When Kōvalaṇ decides to take Kaṇṇaki to Maturai, it is again due to the design of fate:

Driven by the long-awaiting destiny
he undertook to act
and asked his wife
to accompany him. (IX, Ll. 76-78)

The Pandya king orders his men to kill Kōvalaṇ and seize the anklet when he is under the spell of fate:

As it was time for fate
to bear fruit
the Pandya king wearing
the Vēmpu garland
lost his power to ponder.(XVI, Ll. 148-49)

When the Pandya king dies after realizing his folly, Kaṇṇaki tells Kōpperuntēvi:

The man that harms others in the forenoon
will, in the afternoon, witness his fall. (XXI, Ll. 3-4.)

She very often curses herself for having been the instrument of fate:

As directed by destiny dreadful,
Maturai disappearing with its monarch,
having lost my husband there,
I am here – an ill-fated one! (XXIV, Ll. 4-7)

It is pointed out that the Ajīvakas gave importance to pre-destination, destiny and chance and were convinced of the futility of man's efforts. Ṭaṅkō might have been stressing this faith while making repeated references to "destiny" and "effects of evil deeds." Kavunti, the Jain saint in *Cilappatikāram*, echoing the views of her creator, harps on the workings of the inexorable fate:

While afflicted by the effects of dark deeds
The foolish will be baffled, whereas
When haunted by nemesis relentless
The learned will never waver. (XIII, Ll. 31-35)

She, in turn, is advised by the Cāraṇars to be wary of this all-powerful force:

Most honoured Kavunti,
Nemesis will never leave us
Without taking a heavy toll:
When, like the seeds sown,
It grows and demands retribution
we cannot exterminate it. (X, Ll. 170-73)

The Tamil literary tradition had, right from the Caṅkam days, spoken of ūzh, pāl, murai, Uṇmai, Teyvam, Niyati and Viṇai. In one of the Puṇam poems, for instance, Kaṇiyaṇ Pūṅkuṇṇāṇār has observed:

This much praised life of ours a fragile raft
Borne down the waters of some mountain stream
That o'er huge boulders roaring seeks the plain;
Though storms with lightning's flash from
darken'd skies
Descend, the raft goes on as fates ordain.
Thus have we seen in vision of the wise:
we marvel not at greatness of the great;

Still less despise we men of low estate.
(Puraṇānūru 192)

Though Iḷaṅkō's work is an elaboration of this absolute faith in destiny, his characters, as portrayed by him, do not appear to be mere puppets in the hands of some dark force but enjoy a lot of freedom in choosing their course of action and taking their own decisions at critical junctures. For all their miseries they cannot throw the blame on fate. The defects of the major characters are not glossed over. Even Kaṇṇaki is not pictured as a goddess without blemish in the early part of the epic. Kōlvalaṇ's hamartia is failure to foresee the consequences of a deed. He takes rash decisions and plunges into action without being bothered about what that will lead to. Though Mātavi becomes a noble soul at the end chastened by her bitter experiences, she did not consider it wrong to keep Kōlvalaṇ in her fold away from his wedded wife. All the characters expressing their unwavering faith in fate do not become models of equanimity. They are not free from the human passions of joy, sorrow, anger and pride. Even Kavunti, who repeatedly expatiates on the stranglehold of fate and of the need to overcome base passions, loses control over herself and curses a pair of mischievous beings when they speak ill of Kaṇṇaki and Kōlvalaṇ.

The preternatural in *Antigone* and *Cilappatikāram* underscores the role of fate. All the three Greek tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides resort to the use of oracular voices, ghosts, godly apparitions and other supernatural elements. In *Antigone* we come across the description of a mysterious dust-storm. The midday sun forces the watchmen to shield their eyes. The seemingly endless dust-storm compels them to close their eyes altogether and numbs their perceptions. No god makes his appearance in the tragedy but the chorus dances three terror-myths each of which alludes to erotic encounters between gods and mortals. The birds at the place of sacred augury scream barbarously and Hephsestus, the fire god refuses his appearance. The flame does not kindle; the fat, the entrails do not burn. These indicate the anger of the gods with the citizens of Thebes, a polluted city.

There are numerous ghosts in *Cilappatikāram* some of which are entrusted with the task of maintaining law and order in the city of Puhār. Kaṇṇaki's female companion, Tēvanti is said to live with a god in human form for eight years. The yātava women including Mātavi witness a few strange occurrences after Kōlvalaṇ leaves with Kaṇṇaki's anklet and realize that they portend some dire calamity:

The pot-milk won't curdle
 The eyes of humped bulls shed tears:
 Some evil is certain to turn up.
 The pan-butter, when heated, won't melt:
 The young lambs have ceased romping about:
 Some evil is certain to turn up.
 The four-nippled cows weep trembling:
 The bells from their necks fall down:
 Some evil is certain to turn up. (XVII, Ll. 2-4)

Kōpperuntēvi, in her dream, perceives certain ill omens warning her of the impending disaster:

The scepter and the white canopy
 fell tumbling down:
 our King's bell of grievance
 at the palace gate sounded
 striking terror into my heart;
 Rainbow appeared at night;
 'comets fell during daylight;
 The world shook in all directions;
 Some misery is in the offing. (XX, Ll. 8-11)

The supernatural events in both the works stress the puzzling nature of life on earth and are so well integrated with the rest of the happenings that they do not appear to be odd or out of place.

In Greek tragedies, the chorus plays a very prominent role. Being a supple instrument, it can be used for a variety of complex purposes by the playwright. The choral odes in *Antigone* are praised for successfully combining intellectual force and lyric beauty. One of them is a splendid tribute to the achievement of man:

Numberless are the world's wonders, but none
 More wonderful than man: the storm gray sea
 Yields to his prows, the huge crests bear him high:
 Earth, holy and inexhaustible, is graven
 With shining furrows where his plows have gone
 Year after year, the timeless labour of stallions. (Ll. 278-83)

Another marvels at God's vengeance and the wrath of Zeus. Yet another is a celebrated hymn to love:

Love, unconquerable
waster of rich men, Keeper
Of warm lights and all-night vigil
In the soft face of a girl;
Sea-wanderer, forest visitor:
Even the pure immortals cannot escape you,
And mortal man, in his one day's dusk,
Trembles before your glory. (Ll. 641-48)

A hymn to Dionysus, son of Zeus and Semele, is full of mythological allusions.

Iacchos of Thebes
Heavenly child of Semele bride of the Thunderer:
The shadow of plague is upon us; come
With clement feet oh come from Parnasos
Down the long slopes across the lamenting water. (Ll. 892-95)

Āycciyar Kuravai, Vēṭṭuvavari and Kuṇṇakkuravai of *Cilappatikāram* resemble the Greek chorus as they combine music, dance, words of wisdom, and prayers full of mythological allusions. The appeal of every one of the songs in these is irresistible. The songs of the shepherds, the hunters and the mountain lasses using the folk-song motif extensively capture the hearts of sophisticated critics as well as of common readers.

The final message of Sophocles is that wisdom consists in submission to the gods. Towards the end of the play the crest-fallen, grief-stricken Creon is seen being led into the house and his last words are "Fate has brought all my pride to a thought of dust." Man has to accept life with all its misery. Iḷāṅkō's message is one of affirmation with special emphasis on love for fellow-human beings with a view to making this world a pleasant place to live in.

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All subsequent citations of this poem will be of this edition. All English translations of passages from *Cilappatikāram* are mine. The stanza from *Purāṇānūru* is G.U. Pope's version.

²STEINER GEORGE. *Antigones* Oxford: Clarendon press 1984, 8.

Ibid., 1

³Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald, tr. *Antigone*. In *An Introduction to Literature*, Brown and Company, 842-43.

⁴*An Introduction to Literature*, Brown and Company, Ll. 842-43.

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⁵STEINER GEORGE. *Antigones*, 5.

⁶*An Introduction to Literature*, 505.

17. CILAPPATIKĀRAM: A BAKHTINIAN STUDY

There have been numerous essays indicating that *Cilappatikāram*, in its structure, theme and narrative and stylistic features, differs radically from the epics in Sanskrit and Western languages. Its uniqueness becomes evident when it is compared with the well-known epics that have already found a place among world literature. Considered one of the five great epics (Aimperunkāppiyam) in the Tamil literary tradition, *Cilappatikāram* in its *patikam* describes itself as a poem interspersed with prose and songs (uraiyitaiyitta pāṭṭuṭaicceyyuḷ). Cāminātaiyar explains that it is called *Iyalicaināṭakap Poruḷ toṭarnilaicceyyuḷ* since it fuses the three Tamils – Iyal, Icai and Nāṭakam and that it is also known as a *Nāṭakakkāppiyam* since it has dramatic elements in it. In his commentary on “Ceyyuliyaḷ”, Naccinārkkiniyar, while interpreting the phrase ‘pāṭṭitai vaitta kurippu’ as ‘poetic works having songs in between,’ adds that they are writings like *Takaṭūr Yāttirai* and *Cilappatikāram*. And while giving the meaning of the nūrpā, “toṇmaitānē uraiyoṭu puṇarnta paḷamai mēṇṇē,” he cites Peruntēvanār’s *Pāratam*, *Takaṭūr Yāttirai* and *Cilappatikāram* as instances of the genre called *toṇmai*. Those that are intrigued by the architectonics of *Cilappatikāram*, may find the ideas of Bakhtin on the epic and the novel extremely illuminating.

Subjecting the ancient Greco-Roman and European literatures to a close study for an understanding of the novel’s nature, origin and development, Bakhtin demonstrates how the modern novel is very different from the old epic. In his books entitled *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, and *The Dialogic Imagination* and in his essays called “Discourse in the Novel” and “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel”, he expounds his concept of dialogism vis-à-vis the novel and enumerates the discriminating characteristics of the novel in “Epic and Novel: Toward a methodology for the Study of the Novel.” In his view, Dostoevsky’s fiction *The Brothers Karamazov* provides a good example of dialogic narratives by which he means narratives characterized by the interaction of several voices, consciousnesses, or world views, none of which unifies or is superior

to the others. The narrator's views, judgments and even knowledge do not constitute the ultimate authority in a polyphonic narrative as distinguished from a monologic narrative. Multiple discourse is curtailed intentionally in a monologic novel in which the voice of the author predominates whereas the novel's propensity for multiple discourse is explored in the *bildungsroman*, highly developed in Rabelais and extreme in Dostoevsky. By heteroglossia, Bakhtin means that multiplicity of social voices linked and interrelated dialogically which enters the novel through the interplay between authorial speech, narrator speech, *inserted genres*, and character speech.

Bakhtin divides literature into two large classes, "elevated" genres and "low" genres, the former being associated with the established culture and the latter with the popular counter-culture. Calling the novel the totality of genres and subgenres opposed to the dominant culture, he eulogizes its grand cultural mission and its subtle weaving of various types of speech—direct, indirect, and doubly-oriented. In Bakhtin's writings, the carnival in the Renaissance and Middle Ages is indicative of a particular form of popular counter-culture opposed to the medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture. He believes that the influence of carnival is responsible for a set of 'genres of the serio-comical' which have three main features: 1. Their starting point for understanding, evaluating and shaping reality is the living present. 2. They do not rely on legend but consciously on experience and free invention. 3. They are multi-styled and hetero-voiced.

The great Russian literary theorist of the twentieth century contends that a poetics of the novel should take into account the dialogic nature of language itself. Since language is dialogic, the novel is the image of a language; it is itself dialogic imagination. The canonical genres like the tragedy, the epic and the lyric are monologic while the novel which is of recent origin, compared to the "high" poetic genres, is still growing, is still capable of a dynamic evolution, its "generic skeleton" being not yet hardened. On the other hand, the high genres were complete forms even in antiquity. Since the novel was born after the invention of printing, it had to take into account the mode of "mute perception," i.e. reading, whereas the other major forms which existed before the invention of printing were primarily meant for aural perception. The canonized genres seek to establish a single style, a single voice in order to express a particular world view. In them the individual characters may express opposing views but the total effect is one of stylistic and ideological homogeneity. As the novel is

becoming more and more dominant in the modern period, other genres are getting novelized.

Finally, directly contrasting the novel with the epic, Bakhtin points out that the former is an open dynamic form while the latter is a closed one. If in the epic, presenting a past that is distanced, shaped and “absolute”, the character doesn’t change, in the novel the character remains in the process of formation. The epic’s emphasis is on memory, the novel’s on knowledge and experience. The epic’s voice is singular; the novel’s encompasses polyglossia. The novel is a democratic and anarchic form making the political authorities unhappy. Tracing the roots of the novel to folklore, Bakhtin claims that the mimes, bucolic poems, fables, memoirs, Socratic dialogues and Menippean satires written in the third, or fourth or fifth century B.C. were the novel’s predecessors.

Ṭaṅkō Aṭikaḷ’s revolutionary achievement becomes evident when we realize that his epic has completely ignored the distinctions made by Bakhtin between the epic and the novel. Absorbing folkloristic elements into his work, he has given his epic an altogether new shape. He has boldly closed the gap between “high” and “low” genres. One of the major defects of the epics in Sanskrit and Western languages is that those long compositions employ a single poetic form, a single metrical pattern from beginning to end and narrate the story in a single voice which is the author’s and are thus unable to avoid monotony. Their poetry, in no case uniformly and consistently good, has ups and downs, purple passages and prosaic ones alternating. Even *Paradise Lost*, universally accepted as the greatest epic in English, suffers from this defect forcing Dr. Johnson to wonder if anyone can read the whole of it without losing interest off and on. *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *the Iliad*, *the Odyssey*, and *the Divine Comedy* are not exceptions to this rule. It is true that the celebrated authors of these epics manage to manipulate rhythmic variations even while employing a single metre with a view to sustaining aesthetic delight. But their success is limited. Ṭaṅkō Aṭikaḷ, on the other hand, employs numerous strategies to make the work gripping. In his thirty chapters (Kātai) he uses diverse poetic forms. By telling the story rapidly in *nilai maṇṭila āciriyaṭṭa* in twenty chapters and by shifting to *cintiyal veṇṭā* and *nēricai veṇṭā* or to *kāṇal vari* and *vēṭṭuṭṭa vari* or to *kunṛakkuravai* and *āycciyarkuravai* or to *kalivenṭā*, *koccakakkali*, *uraiperu kaṭṭurai* and *uraippāṭṭumaṭai* in the other chapters, Ṭaṅkō Aṭikaḷ holds his readers spellbound. The folk songs that periodically make their appearance captivate the reader’s heart and soul. The twenty-

two *srutis* and one hundred and three *paṇs* in the epic have won the special praise of experts in music. Folklore has left a lasting impression on all the chapters from *maṅkala vāḷttuppāṭal* to *varam taru kātai*. Not only many folk-songs that allude to myths but also a few fascinating ones that describe contemporary life and daily activities of ordinary people find a place in the epic at strategic contexts. Besides these, the desires and beliefs, joys and sorrows, customs and rituals of the villagers and much more representing their culture and feelings are given as much of importance as the life of the upper classes of the cities. Since there is a delightful fusion of poetry, music and dance, one of the discerning modern critics, Tamil Ōḷi feels that it is neither an epic nor a drama but an opera to be performed on the stage, blending as it does melodious music and a variety of folk dances. He fails to notice that it goes far beyond an opera as its chief qualities are epical.

Alain Danielou, who translated the Tamil epic into English, views every *kātai* in it as a tale, as a novel in verse. It may be recalled here that to T.P.Meenakshisundaran, *Cilappatikāram* is the first attempt at converting the individual lyrics of the Caṅkam period into a long narrative poem and from the standpoint of Caṅkam literature, *Cilappatikāram* is but a series of thirty individual poems. He further points out that each *kātai* is the statement of an individual (*Kūṟru*) narrating a story from his or her point of view. The veteran commentator (*arumpatavuraikārar*) himself has observed that *kunṟakkuravai* is a statement of the heroine's female companion announcing the wedding. *Varantarukātai* is, beyond doubt, the only statement by the author. All the other chapters are structured like statements by the observers (*kaṇṭōr*) or others. Each of these is complete in itself and explains whatever is required and, therefore, none of them can be termed a *paṭalam* or an *attiyāyam* of a traditional epic. All of them grow not by emphatically narrating the story but by providing hints about the story. *Kunṟakkuravai*, which may be taken as the confidante's statement, strings together the hilltribe's songs and merely refers to the incident that Kaṇṇaki, while standing by the side of a *Vēṅkai* tree, was taken away with her husband to the heaven. *Araṅkēṟru Kātai*, after dwelling at length on the kingdom and the condition of the teacher of music and of others, narrates the story only in the last twelve lines.

Antimālai Cīrappuc cey kātai becomes the description of an evening in Pukār and displays Kaṇṇaki as one of the depressed and Mātavi as one of the delighted. *Intiraviḷavūr Etutta Kātai* is an independent poem celebrating the festival named after Intiraṇ. The chief objective of *Kaṭalāṭu*

kātai is the delineation of the beauty of Pukār as shown by the viñcaiyan to his wife; Mātavi's dance is mentioned as one of the beauties of the city. A large part of the chapter called (*kāṇal vari*) consists of only (*kāṇal vari*) songs. When the *kātais* are thus viewed as individual statements in the form of individual poems, it will be realized that Iḷaṅkō's work differs in its structure from the epics in Sanskrit and Western languages as well as from the Tamil epics such as *Maṇimēkalai*, *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* and *Kambaramayanam*. As T.P.Meenakshisundaran observes, when each of the three cantos is read in isolation, *Pukārkkāṇṭam* may be found to be a comedy which ends with the happy union of Kōvalan and Kaṇṇaki after years of painful separation, *Maturaikkāṇṭam*, a tragedy which ends with the death of the hero, and *Vaṇcikkāṇṭam*, a historical drama which sings the victory of Cēraṇ Ceṇkuṭṭuvan.

The major characters of *Cilappatikāram* are neither gods nor kings but common human beings. Even though it speaks of the three great kings of Tamilnadu, what it narrates is the story of the three citizens Kaṇṇaki, Kōvalan and Mātavi, who are not free from common human weaknesses. Kaṇṇaki may be deified at the end but, in the first canto, she is a young woman who cannot retain the love of her husband, and, in the second canto, an angry, vengeful and egotistic being who doesn't hesitate to burn the city of Maturai even after the repentant king and his grief – stricken wife are dead. Kōvalan born of a community of merchants is one that doesn't mind deserting his wife and living with a courtesan bought for gold, an average man who acts impulsively without thinking about the consequences and a prodigal who squanders his enormous wealth in a foolish and wasteful way. Mātavi is a courtesan, who by getting gold, is prepared to be the companion of a man already married to another woman. All these three commit mistakes at the beginning, regret their behaviour because of painful experiences and achieve purification and refinement. They are very different from the heroes and heroines of the ancient epics but are similar to the chief characters in modern western novels. In *Cilappatikāram*, there is no villain of epical dimensions either. The goldsmith who steals the anklet brought by Kōvalan and causes his murder by implicating him in a heinous crime is not elevated to the level of a Ravana or a Dhuryodhana or an Iago, the very personification of evil. The other epics glorify men's heroism and women's love. But in *Pukārkkāṇṭam*, the dominant *rasa* is pity and in *Vaṇcikkāṇṭam*, wonder.

Ṭaṅkō's revolutionary violation of the traditional epic conventions starts from the very beginning of the epic. The first k̄atai doesn't describe the hero's birth. The wedding of Kōvalan and Kaṇṇaki takes place and the couple is felicitated by many who dance and sing an auspicious song. There is no invocation to the Almighty or to any of the known Hindu gods or goddesses or to the Buddha or to Aruṇa. In the songs that praise the sun, the moon, the rain and the city Pūmpukār, the moon is compared to the Coḷa king's parasol, the sun to his mandate, the rain to his bounty. Man is ultimately praised in the form of tributes to nature. This k̄atai, as T.P.M. has noted, takes the form of a wedding-invitation in which the place of the bride and the bridegroom, their names, the decision of their parents to join them in wedlock are mentioned one after another. The scene depicting young ladies resembles a dance-performance and the k̄atai ends with a chant in praise of the king:

May the tiger-emblem, inscribed on the brow
Of the Himalayas, dwell on its golden crest
Forever. May Cempiyan, of the spear fierce
In the great battle, whirl his ever victorious wheel.
(I 65-68)

The prayer to God and the poet's expression of extraordinary humility (avaiaṭakkam) found at the beginning of classical epics are conspicuous by their absence. The third k̄atai is not a continuation of the second for it introduces Mātavi, describes the expertise of the dance master, the music teacher, the poet, the percussion artist, the flutist, the Vina artist and then passes on to give a photographic account of the stage, the *talaikkōl* (taken in a procession to the dance hall and placed prominently, its head facing the distinguished audience), the dance Mātavi performed leading to the award of a title and the prize of a priceless necklace and a thousand and eight pieces of gold. *Antimālai Cirappuc cey k̄atai* is also unique, as its theme is the evening which adds to the grief of chaste wives parted from their husbands and to the joy of women in the company of their lovers. The moon providing cool shade to those who honour him and unbearable heat to others, appears benign to Mātavi and hostile to lonely Kaṇṇaki.

The description of Pukār in *Intiraviḷavūreṭutta K̄atai* is not similar to that of prosperous cities in other epics. Unlike those ideal cities, it is pictured as a real one where we come across stately homes, the settlements of yavanas, and well-laid out streets:

In the city itself stood the Kingsway,
 The flagged car street, the market square,
 The boulevard where merchant princes dwelt
 In tall mansions, the Brahman homes,
 The houses of landed families and their tenant
 Farmers, of physicians, astrologers, and those employed
 In other tasks, the broad street
 Of the homes of those who with skill bored
 Holes into bright gems, and those who polished
 Ornate conches. In separate houses
 Lived charioteers, bards, panegyrists,
 Astronomers, handsome dancers, harlots,
 Actresses, flower-and-betel girls,
 Maidservants, professional musicians,
 Drummers of various sorts and jesters. (V 40 – 53)

In *Kaṭalāṭu Kātai*, a noble hero of Viñcai city shows his wife the far-peaked Himālaya, the Ganga swollen with water, the city of Ujjayini, the Vindhyā forests, the Vēṇkaṭam hills, the land of the Kāviri and finally both of them visit Pukār where they see the joyous festival. The eleven dances performed by Mātavi reenact scenes from several myths and purāṇās. Keeping in mind such passages, Naccinārkkīṇiyar might have felt that *Cilampu* is an instance of what Tolkāppiyar calls *tonmai*. In *Vēṭṭuva vari* again, the story doesn't receive any importance. On the other hand, it is primarily concerned with Cālīṇi, the priestess to the Maṇava community, the sacrifice of the Maṇavar, the choice of the priestess, the appearance of Korṛavai, the worship of Korṛavai and the life of the *eyiṇar* of the pālai region. In *Ūrkāṇ kātai*, there is another realistic account of a city, this time, Maturai, where Kōvalan walks past the big street with its two rows of elegant mansions, the market place where things are spread out in rich profusion, the renowned goldsmiths' street, the cloth merchants' street, the grain merchants' street, the streets of the four castes, the crossings of three or four streets, meeting places and little streets and lanes.

Āycciyar *kuravai* is out and out folkloristic in form and matter. The herdswomen see some bad omens and complain:

The milk in the pot hasn't curdled. Tearful
 Are the eyes of the big humped bulls.

Some evil is about to happen.

The sweet butter in the hanging pot doesn't melt.
The lambs lie down and don't romp about.
Some evil is about to happen.

Herds of cows with four-nippled udders tremble
And moo. The bells slip from their necks.
Some evil is about to happen.

This *Uraippāṭṭumaṭai* (narrative interlude) is followed by *Karuppam* (prediction), *koḷu* (theme), *eṭuttukkāṭṭu* (examples), *kūttuḷpaṭutal* (participation in the dance), *pāṭṭu* (song), *onṛanpakuti* (songs with one beat), *āṭunarppukaltal* (in praise of the dancers), *uḷvarivāḷttu* (in praise of the masquerade dance), *muṇṇilaipparaval* (praising the lord to his face) and *paṭarkkaip paraval* (praising the lord to his back).

Mātari tells her daughter that in order to rid the cows and calves of their pain they will perform the round dance in the presence of Kaṇṇaki, one of the boyhood dances of Māyavaṇ and Balarāmaṇ with Piṇṇai. Seven girls are chosen by Mātari, who declares that they belong respectively to the one who leaps without fear on the black bull, who tames the bull with red spots on its forehead, who mounts the strong, young bull, who controls the bull with small, white spots, who overcomes the bull with gold spots, who defeats the victorious young bull, who overpowers the pure, white bull. She asks them to stand in the traditional order and gives the name of a musical note to each of them. Piṇṇai puts the rich basil garland on Māyavaṇ and begins the flawless dance. Mātari claims that it was Piṇṇai that turned the gaze of the Lord away from his consort. In the circle the girls take their positions, hold one another's arms and study the rhythm for the dance. The song of Māyavaṇ alludes to his great deeds:

O friend! Māyavaṇ struck down the fruit
With a calf as his stick. Today if he came
Among our herd of cows, won't we hear
The sweet laburnum flute at his mouth?
O friend! Māyavaṇ churned the ocean
With a serpent as his rope. If he came here
Among our herd of cows, won't we hear
The sweet bamboo flute at his mouth?

O friend! Māyavaṇ pulled out the citrus tree

In our broad uplands. At daytime if he came
Among our herd of cows, won't we hear
The sweet jasmine flute at his mouth?

None can resist the charm of the folk songs in which the device of refrain is used with extraordinary effect. There are exquisite brief accounts of the deeds of Mayōṇ mentioned in myths and purāṇās: his churning the belly of the sea with the northern mountain as a churning-stick and the serpent Vācuki as a rope, his devouring the entire universe though hunger doesn't trouble him, his striding the three worlds with his two lotus-feet to rid them of darkness, and his serving the Pāṇṭavās as their envoy. The Lord is praised in ever memorable words:

Ears are not ears that haven't heard of the glory
Of the old warrior who kept his promise....
Eyes are not eyes that haven't seen the dark lord
With red feet, eyes and lips...
Tongues are not tongues that haven't praised the lord
Who frustrated the wiles of foolish Kamsa...

The chapter mainly drawing its inspiration from folklore comes to an end with a typical folk appeal to the folk-deity:

May the god praised in the round dance
That we performed remove the troubles
Of our cows!

Kuṇṛakkuravai is another *kātai* which deals with the life and work of another group of socially "inferior" people, hill dwellers, who first witness the scene of Kaṇṇaki being taken to heaven with her husband by the gods and deify her:

Let us honour this woman as our goddess, O people
Of small huts! Let us honour this goddess
...
Sound the great drum
Sound the little drum, blow the horn
Ring the loud bell, sing the *kuṛiñci* raga,
Offer strong incense, and rain flowers
In honour of this woman who has lost a breast
So that our mountains are forever blessed with plenty.

This uraippāṭṭumaṭai (narrative interlude) is followed by koḷuccol (theme), Ciraippuram (interlude – the friend speaks to her), Pāṭṭumaṭai – Aṟattoṭu nilai (she speaks to her friend), Pāṭṭumaṭai (interlude – her friend speaks to her – he within earshot), and Pāṭṭumaṭai (interlude – again the friend speaks to her). Apart from the opening lines giving an eye-witness account of the ascension of Kaṇṇaki, there is nothing in the kātai that takes the story any further. Following the akam conventions of Caṅkam poetry, the songs dramatise the love-sickness of a hill-maid who confides in her friend how it has been caused and how their mother is mistaken about it.

Good woman with striped bangles!
This makes me laugh: Mother who hasn't heard
The village gossip thinks I am possessed by Kaṭampan.
She has called the shaman to perform the dance
To rid me of this illness caused by the man
From the cool mountain on which peppercorns grow.

Good woman with fair bangles!
This makes me laugh: if the Lord who brought down
The *Kuruku* mountain comes here, he is a bigger fool
Than the shaman who comes to rid me of the illness
Caused by the man from the high mountain.

But her friend consoles her expressing her hope that the man from the high mountain is bound to come back to marry her.

The son of the lord seated under the banyan tree
And his wife will come on his peacock
To the courtyard where the shaman performs the dance.
When he comes, we will ask his blessing for our marriage
With the man from the high mountain.

...

Lord of six faces! We adore your feet
And the mountain girl of our tribe.
We ask that our man who touched your holy feet
And promised to wed have a true marriage
And end our lovemaking in secret.

The heroine's confidante tells her that the hero hiding himself was listening to them while they sang and that she later told him that the people of the small huts would not accept him as the god wreathed in a katampā garland. Then they all sing in praise of the woman who honoured

their place by visiting it and pray to her to see to it that all will be well with their village:

If we sing in honour of the woman
Who will not be sent back from heaven, a favour
Will be bestowed on this village. A favour is bestowed
On our village, a favour is bestowed on it. A favour
Is bestowed on our village, of seeing the marriage
Of the woman with gold bangles and her husband.

The *kātai* ultimately turns out to be a beautiful scene from the hilltribe's joyous life of song and dance.

Vāltukkātai consists of a rare benediction, the daughters of Vañci praying to the goddess Kaṇṇaki to bless the royal trinity of the Tamil land. The variety of narrative techniques in it is matched by a variety of songs. The preface in prose (*uraippāṭṭu maṭai*), briefly telling the story of the dedication of the image of Kaṇṇaki for which Cēran Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ brought a stone from the Himalaya and of the tragic deaths of Kaṇṇaki's mother, mother-in-law and Mātari, goes on to describe the visit of Kaṇṇaki's foster-mother, her close friend, Tēvanti and Aiyai to the palace of Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ. During their meeting, Tēvanti burst into a song revealing her identity:

Know me as the friend of that goddess

...

Know me as the friend of the woman of the Cōla country.

In her song, Kaṇṇaki is described as the one, "born in the northern Himālaya and bathed in the swirling waters of the Gangā". Kaṇṇaki's foster mother claims in another song that her daughter "did not give vent to her anger toward the fair and pleasant Mātavi but hand in hand walked with her dear husband through the terrible forest where even a handful of water could not be found in the wells. In a third song, Kaṇṇaki's close friend praises her as the one "who said not a word to the mother who gave her birth, to the foster mother who raised her, or even to me, but followed her husband as a dutiful wife". Before the image of Kaṇṇaki, all the three lament reporting to her what happened to her parents, parents-in-law, Mātavi and her daughter Maṇimēkalai. Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṇ sees Kaṇṇaki in a vision and is told by her that in heaven she is reconciled with the Pāṇṭiya king whom she has accepted as her father.

Revealing his astonishment, he says,

What! O, what is this? O, what is this?
 O, what is this? I see a vision in the sky
 Of a lightning figure with gold anklets
 A girdle, bangles round her arms, earrings
 Of gold set with rare diamonds,
 And other ornaments of pure gold.
 Greeting all of them, she speaks of her present position:
 Blameless is the Pāṇṭiyan, now an honoured guest
 In the palace of the king of the gods.
 I am his daughter. I am going to play
 On Veṇvēlāṇ's hill. Friends, come there, all of you!

The strange vision is followed by the chorus of the girls of Vañci, who without bias, praise the three kings and invoke the goddess in a melodious series of triplets and quadruplets. The Cōla king is praised for being the descendant of great ones that have great conquests to their credit. *Ammāṇai* (a class of poems, each verse of which has *ammāṇai* as its refrain and is supposed to be sung by girls while playing with wooden balls) is used for this purpose.

Ammāṇai, who is the victorious king
 Praised by heaven that sat on the scales
 And offered a piece of his own flesh
 For the sake of a dove?
 Ammāṇai, the king that offered a piece
 Of his own flesh is the guardian who sought justice
 For the sake of a cow.
 Ammāṇai, let us sing of that king's city, Pukār.

If Pukār, the birthplace of Kaṇṇaki, receives this praise, the Teṇṇavaṇ, who has now been completely forgiven by Kaṇṇaki, is blessed in *kantukavari* (song of the ball).

Let us run forward, sit, dart back and forth,
 Moving in all directions, as if the climber of the sky,
 Lightning, has struck the earth.
 Let us run and strike the ball, saying
 "May the king of the southern countries live forever!
 May Teṇṇavaṇ live forever!
 Let us strike the ball, saying, "May the king whose chest
 Is adorned with Indra's garland live forever!

For the Cēra king, Ūcal (the song of the swing) is the folksong chosen.

Shall we not swing tossing our long, black hair,
Singing of the valor of the lord of the mountain,
The cēral king, Poraiyan, who offered
An enormous amount of food in the war
Between five Pāṇṭavas and the hundred Kauravas?
Shall we not swing, singing of how
The kaṭampa oak was pulled apart?

The final vallaippāṭṭu (a song by women husking or hulling grain) has one verse each for the three. In the song of Cempīyaṇ, the women of Pukār, using sweet sugarcane as pestles, pound choice pearls in the shade of the flowering Portia tree. In the song of Pañcavaṇ, the women of Maturai, using red coral pestles, pound pearls. In the song of Cērā king, the women of Vañci, using white ivory pestles, pound rare pearls in sandalwood mortars.

Of the thirty cantos, only twenty two are called *kātai* and tell the story in choice words and measured phrases. The first canto is called Maṅkalavālttu, a song that blesses. Three cantos are called *vari*, a type of folksong that is combined with dance. Two are called *kuravai*, a round dance with song. The other two are *mālai*, a garland of verses. In all these, Aṭikaḷ demonstrates that he has the skills of all the artists he describes in the third canto:

An expert in the traditions of the dance, her tutor
Knew well the rules of the folk and classical styles.

...

Guided by the exact convention of the texts,
He classified and elaborated upon the different types
Of dances and songs that consort with them,
In the true spirit of their composers.

...

An expert
On the theater, he knew its two sections,
The vēttiyaḷ and potuviyaḷ, knew the melody
Improvised by the music teacher. Guided
By the exact conventions of the texts,
And aware of the faulty phrase of his rivals
He was resolute to avoid them in his own work.

...

He knew the way hard and soft consonants
were mellowed to ravish the ear.

Aṭiḷaḷ knew the Caṅkam tradition but had a repertoire of revolutionary and innovative devices and techniques at his beck and call. The pālai region is described in *vēṭṭuva vari*, the marutam in *nāṭukāṇ kātai*, the neytal in *kāṇalvari*, the *kuriñci* in *kuṇṇakkuravai* and the mullai in *āycciyar kuravai*. All the three capitals, Pukār, Maturai and Vañci are shown from different angles with kaleidoscopic variations.

The first canto sings of the glorious city of Pukār, of the grandeur of its festivals, of the coming of the gods, of the perennial joy of its subjects, of the divinity of the Kāviri that destroys evil and of the stages, dances, *tūḷku* and *vari*. The second canto sings of the virtues and victories of the Pāṇṭiya dynasty, of the preeminence of the old city of Maturai, of the splendour of its festivals, of the endless joy of its subjects, of the fertility caused by the great Vaiyai, and of the two types of drama known as *ārapaṭi* and *Cāttuvaṭi*. The third canto sings of the greatness of the Cēra king, of the matchless beauty of the city of Vañci, of the glory of its festivals, of the unalloyed joy of its subjects and of the songs and dances with their subtle interrelationships. And the entire work, as it is claimed in the “Epilogue”, like a mirror reflecting the distant hills, reflects the essence of the Tamil land, enclosed by the Kumari and Vēṅkaṭam and by the eastern and western seas, comprises the five landscapes of Centamiḷ and koṭuntamiḷ and its language expresses in perfect rhythm the themes of love and war, and there are exquisite songs and dances that conform to the rules of the *vari*, *kuravai* and *cētam*.

Bakhtin’s conclusion that while the modern novel identifies itself completely with contemporary life, the epic keeps its distance from the real life of humans here and now is not true of *Cilappatikāram*, which freely crosses the boundaries of the traditional epic in many respects, especially by combining the features of “high” and “low” genres and by including the carnivalesque. The Russian critic would have certainly been astounded by the uniqueness of this epic-novel and heaped upon it the praise he had reserved for Dostoevsky’s fiction if only he had known about it. That *Cilappatikāram* achieves a fusion of what he identified as the most canonical and the most popular of literary forms by speaking in the same breath about the four lasting values of human life and about the life of the hunters, milkmaids and hill tribes and by celebrating the great kings and the commoners would have delighted Bakhtin immensely.

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18. PHILOSOPHY AS POETRY: BUDDHISM IN *MAṆIMĒKALAI*

Buddhism entered Tamilnadu in the third century B.C., flourished in the sixth century A.D., declined in the eighth but lingered on till the end of the sixteenth.¹ It might have been introduced first into the Tamil kingdom by Asoka's missionaries on their way to Ceylon. Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese traveller who was in India from 629 to 646 A.D., mentions that he saw an Asokan pillar of about a hundred feet high in the city of Kanchi. *Talaing Chronicles*, the source book of Burmese Buddhism, reveals that Asoka built a Vihāra near Kanchi, in which Acharya Dharmapala stayed and wrote 14 commentaries on Pali texts. The great Buddhist dialecticians, Asanga, Vasubandhu, Shankaraswamin, Dinnaga, Paramartha and Dharmakirithi had contacts with Kanchi, one of the earliest centres of Buddhist learning. Many Brahmi epigraphs unearthed from different parts of Tamilnadu disclose that cave-beds were established for the use of Buddhist monks even in the pre-Christian era.

Buddhism has naturally had an almost incalculable effect on the art, thought, literature and way of life of the Tamils. Aiyaṇār, who is also known as Hariharaputra and Shāsta, one of the popular male deities in the rural areas of Tamilnadu, is supposed to have been originally a Buddhist god. Shāstā, Muṇi, Muṇīndrā, Viṇāyakā and Dharmarājā are some of the names of the Buddha mentioned in the lexicon *Amarakosha*. The Annapurani shrine found within the Kamakshi temple at Kanchi first housed Manimekala and that Kamakshi is considered to be the Buddhist goddess Tara.²

According to historians, the rural administration in Tamilnadu, under the later Pallavās and the Cōlās must have received a fillip from Buddhism since in the pattern of the local government with its characteristic committee system based on the Sangha administration the influence of Buddhism may be traced.³ The importance of the wide range of Buddhist art in any study of the philosophy and art of Asia cannot be overemphasized. Many

icons of the Buddha have been excavated from Kanchi. The impact of Buddhist architecture is to be seen in the various styles now found in South India.

The apsidal-ended temple, the pyramidal-storeyed temple, the wagon-headed roof and the circular shrine chamber found in some temples on the West coast are so obviously Buddhist in origin.⁴

The external designs of the temples of Mahablipuram, popularly known as the Seven Pagodas, bears ample testimony to the Buddhist influence.

The contribution of Buddhism to Tamil literature is more valuable than the other benefits it might have conferred on the Tamil society, though unfortunately, many great Buddhist works in Tamil have been irrecoverably lost. Even the incomparable Caṅkam anthologies include a few poems by Buddhist poets like Iḷampōtiyār, Caṅkavaruṇaṇ, Tērātaran and Cīruveṇṭēraiyaṛ. At least one of the lyrics in *Puraṇānūru* is claimed to be a faithful rendering of a passage from *Dhammapada*, which contains the gist of the essential principle of Buddha's doctrine.⁵ There are scholars who aver that Vaḷḷuvar, the author of *Tirukkuraḷ*, the crown jewel of Tamil classics, must have been a Buddhist. Though this has not been proved beyond a shadow of doubt, the unmistakable influence of Buddhist thought on Vaḷḷuvar is discernible in his work. The arrangement of chapters is closely modeled upon *Dhammapada*; most of the terms used to refer to God in the first chapter, which is a glorification of the Supreme Being, are applicable to the Buddha and they are the appellations used in some Buddhist works; his emphasis on social equality, forgiveness, gentleness and forbearance, his advocacy of abstinence from meat and drink, his condemnation of concubinage, and his stress on the impermanence of worldly things and the value of renunciation proclaim his sympathy for Buddhist ethics; his chapter on Maruntu (medicine) is replete with echoes from Buddha's discourse to Bharadvaja on medicine.⁶

Two of the five great epics in Tamil, *Kuṇṭalakēci* and *Maṇimēkalai* are authored by men with pronounced Buddhist leanings while the rest are attributed to Jains. *Kuṇṭalakēci* by Nātagupta, assigned to the tenth century, purports to be the story of a rich lady, who after having been deceived by her robber-husband, kills him, joins the order of the Nirgranthas, defeats many religious teachers in debates and finally becomes a Buddhist nun

after having been convinced of the greatness of Buddhism. But the chief aim of the book is to glorify Buddhism and to denounce other religions, especially Jainism. For the story, the epic is indebted to the Pali works:

- 1) The commentary on the *Dhammapada* by Buddhaghosha,
- 2) The commentary called *Manorathapuram*,
- 3) Jatakas and
- 4) The Therigātha commentary.

Unfortunately only a few stanzas of the book are available now. *Nīlakēci*, another minor kavya in Tamil written in imitation of *Kuṇṭalakeci* but to defend Jainism contains a number of quotations from its rival. According to a commentary on *Nīlakēci*, the Sautrantika school seems to be the one that was prevalent at that time in Tamilnadu.

Vimbicāra Katai (The story of Vimbicāra) deals with the life of Bimbisara of Magadha, a contemporary of Buddha. Only four lines of this epic in blank verse describing the manner of Buddha's birth survive. *Siddhāntattokai* ("Anthology of Doctrines") and *Tiruppatikam* are two lost works, known to us only in fragments from citations in the commentaries on *Nīlakēci* and on *Sivagnānacittiyār*. *Vīracōliyam*, a grammatical work of the eleventh century written by Buddhāmītra in honour of Vīra Rājēndrā, cites as illustrative examples passages from great Buddhist works. These citations witness to the vast variety of Buddhist works that might have been written in Tamil. The violent attacks on Jainism in these works reveal to us that in addition to the Bhakti Movement, the political power enjoyed by the Jains might have also been responsible for the suppression and destruction of Buddhist literature.⁷

That *Maṇimēkalai* has survived such dangerous times is a reflection upon its greatness. The title of the book, which may be translated as The Jewel Belt, is the name of the heroine and of one of the great Buddhist goddesses mentioned in the *Jatakas*, who also appears in the poem. The epic consists of 4861 akaval lines (a kind of blank verse) in 30 cantos. The story goes that its author Cāttan and Iḷaṅkō, the author of *Cilappatikāram*, were contemporaries and that it was at the request of Cāttan that the other wrote his immortal epic.⁸ Once the consensus of opinion was in favour of assigning both the works to the 2^d century A.D., but now a linguistic analysis of the two works has revealed that both are post-Caṅkam works and that

Maṇimēkalai was written at least two or three centuries after the Caṅkam classics. Several phrases and images from those works are used by Cāttan in *Maṇimēkalai*. There are echoes of at least ten passages from *Puranānūru*, two from *Perumpāṇāruppatai*, one from *Tirumurukāruppatai*, one from *Neṭunalvatai*, and two from *Akanānūru*.

The story of *Maṇimēkalai* is supposed to be a continuation of what has already been superbly treated by Iḷaṅkō in his *Cilappatikāram*. Towards the end of the earlier epic, Kaṇṇaki takes revenge upon the Pandya King for having killed her husband unjustly by burning up the city of Maturai. Realising his folly, the king dies of shock; Kaṇṇaki is taken to heaven by some divine beings in a celestial car; Mātavi, the danseuse, joins the Buddhist order along with her daughter Maṇimēkalai.

The later epic takes up the story from here beginning with the renunciation of the heroine at a very early age. The public that has admired the mother and the daughter as beautiful dancers does not relish their joining the nunnery and wants the younger one to follow the hereditary profession of a courtesan. But the strong-willed maiden is firm even though she finds herself drawn to the Cōla prince Utayakumaraṇ, who is in love with her. Later she learns that the real reason for this magnetic charm is that she has been his wife in a series of former births. But her own indomitable will and the encouragement of her mother and the help rendered by Buddhist angels enables her to free herself from human ties. The prince relentlessly pursues her but she is magically removed by the goddess Maṇimēkala to the island of Maṇipallavam, where she sees the miraculous Buddha seat and learns all about her past life. She secures a magic bowl which is ever full of food and returns to her place Kavirippūmpaṭṭinam and dedicates herself to social service. To keep the prince away from her, she takes the form of another woman, whose husband, a Vidyadhara, mistaking the prince to be a seducer of his wife, kills him. The king orders her arrest and the queen ill-treats her in prison. When all her machinations prove futile, the queen realizes the greatness of Maṇimēkalai, and sets her free. The young nun, then, goes to Cāvakam, now identified with Sumatra, and makes friends with its ruler, who happens to be the first possessor of the magic bowl in his previous birth.⁹ At Vañci, she gets herself grounded in various schools of philosophy by having discussions with learned men of different faiths. Finally, she goes to Kanchi, meets Aṛavaṇa Aṭikal, the embodiment of Buddhist scholarship and sitting at his feet learns Buddhist ethics, logic and philosophy. After

attaining wisdom, she settles there permanently to do penance to attain nirvana.

The story is full of improbabilities and supernatural occurrences. But then they are common features of even more professedly sober works on Buddhism. The Buddhists and the Jains thought that their subtle and complex doctrines might appeal to the common people only when they were offered by means of interesting stories and anecdotes. Cāttaṇ makes use of a number of stories from *Jatakamala*, which dealing with different avatars of Buddha, took shape in the 2^d century A.D. The goddess Maṇimēkala, the guardian deity of the sea, after whom the heroine is named, is said to have saved one of the ancestors of Kōvalaṇ from getting drowned in the sea. This feat of the goddess is mentioned in *Shankha Jataka* and *Mahajanaka Jataka*. According to Prof. Levy, this sea-goddess known in Siam, Burma, Ceylon and Cambodia belongs to South India where Kanchi or Puhar had been her place of worship. In *Maṇimēkalai*, there are two references to the white carpet of Indra which quivers whenever Bodhisattvas are in distress and need his help. Several Jatakas mention the yellow stone throne of Indra which shakes on similar occasions. The island of Maṇipallavam, where Maṇimēkalai comes to know of her previous birth and later gets the miraculous bowl, is now identified with a part of the present Jaffna called Kāraitṭivu. *Akitta Jataka* speaks of the contacts between Maṇipallavam and Kāviriṇṇaṇṇam. Cāttaṇ's version of the story about the Buddha seat at Maṇipallavam which he occupies while settling the quarrel between two kings of Nāgaṇāṇṇu, his numerous references to number seven as an auspicious one, his mention of the custom of offering betel leaves and camphor after food and of Bhikkunis participating in religious disputations are all based on ideas derived from *the Jatakas*. Many of the Buddha's miracles mentioned in *the Jatakas* such as the offering of his eyes to Indra, who wants to test his generosity, his descent into hell to redeem its inhabitants, and his preaching the Dharma of Grace to a garuda in order to protect snakes from its violence do find a place in *Maṇimēkalai*.

The poem does not have a well-knit plot unlike its predecessor *Cilappatikāram*, which testifies to the architectonic skill of Iḷaṅkō. To Cāttaṇ himself, the story seems to be of lesser importance than the propagation of Buddhist ideology. Characterization is also sacrificed at the altar of Buddhist propaganda. Maṇimēkalai is a lovely doll, all the time preaching or feeding the poor. A puppet in the hands of supernatural forces, she does not have the tragic grandeur of Kaṇṇaki or the vitality of

Mātavi in *Cilappatikāram*. The story moves fast but lacks human interest because the prince's lust, the queen's malice, Āputtiraṇ's love for the poor, and the vidyadhara's love for his wife are not handled with a subtlety that is aesthetically satisfying. "In *Cilappatikāram*, ethics and religion serve art; in *Maṇimēkalai*, the reverse is the case."¹⁰ If the former is interested in the social and political aspects of the Tamil life, the latter's preoccupations are religious and philosophical. And so Aravaṇa Aṭikal's role is given a lot of importance, even though he is not vitally linked with the main plot of the poem. He is like the Greek chorus inasmuch as he knows much more than the other characters of the poem and is used by the author to reveal his opinion on what happens. Kavunti in the other epic, though playing the role of a witness or spectator, is not so sober or mature as Aravaṇa Aṭikal, a Bodhisattva par excellence, whose saintliness is acknowledged by everyone. Endowed with a spiritual vision, he knows all the characters, and their previous and future births as well. Prof. Kuppuswami Sastri argues Aravaṇa Aṭikal was none other than Acharya Dharmapala while Sesha Iyer identifies him with Dinnaga himself."¹¹ These are interesting suggestions but unfortunately they blur the distinctions between life and art. Cāttaṇ's portrayal of this character might have been influenced by his acquaintance with the life and teachings of those great Āchāryas.

Even in the case of its verse form, *Maṇimēkalai* cuts a sorry figure when compared with its twin epic. Cāttaṇ's absolute mastery of the *akaval* form cannot be called into question, since he can use it effectively in the narrative as well as in the meditative parts of the poem. But the *akaval* moves on without the relief of lyrics whereas in *Cilappatikāram* the monotony of the *akaval* is avoided by the introduction of different kinds of folk-songs and also passages in poetic prose. Cāttaṇ's genius, it is to be conceded, is evident in his descriptions of natural scenes and in the telling images he employs.

Both Pērāciriyaṇ and Naccinarkkiṇiyaṇ have observed that of the eight types of *Vanappu* (elegance) which Tolkappiyaṇ enumerates, *Maṇimēkalai* is to be categorized as *Iyaipu*, verses that have any of the eleven consonantal endings – ñ, ṇ, ṇ, m, ṇ, y, r, l, v, l, l. Besides a lucid exposition of complex religious and philosophical thoughts especially where Cāttaṇār pleads for the acceptance of Buddhist ideology and rejects the other religions and sects represented by Vedic logicians, Saivites, Brahmavadins, Vaishnavites, Vedic ritualists, Ajivakas, Nirgranthas, Sankhyas, Vaiseshikas and

Bhutavadins, the one chief merit that can't be denied to the epic is its use of striking similes and metaphors.

On hearing from Mātavi that *Maṇimēkalai* won't live the life of a courtesan, Vacantamālai felt as dejected as those that lost a rare jewel in a large sea of rising waves (II 72 -73). The dreadful sinner called hunger ruins noble birth, kills the virtue of the high-born, rids them of the support of knowledge, makes them shameless and ugly and drives them to the streets together with their wives (XI 79-81). The Naga chief holding court and his wife look like a bear and its female (XVI 66-69). Holding the nectar-vessel, *Maṇimēkalai* arrived on the scene just as the rain cloud pouring with thunder and lightning reaches a forest burnt by the sun with its dried bamboo champs (XVII 90-94). Infuriated by the news of *Maṇimēkalai*'s wandering with a begging bowl, Citrāpati, describing the royal life of the courtesans, says that they are like a lute that is not broken when the lutanist dies, like the bee that feeding on honey deserts the blossom when it becomes bankrupt and like the goddess of wealth who abandons men during days of ruin (XVIII 18-22). Utayaṇaṇ, in search of Kāñcaṇaṇ rises like an angered serpent that bares its poison teeth and raises up its hood (XX 98-102). It is with the grief of her son's loss as flame and the mind as firewood that the fire burns the queen's heart (XXIII 131-33).

Cāttaṇār excels in the characteristic Buddhist denigration of the human body. Cutamati warns the prince against being captivated by the human body which is an outcome of previous deeds, a field for the growth of more, a receptacle of ills, a container of sins, and a pit that hides the snake called anger (IV 113 -121). *Maṇimēkalai*'s account of what time does to the beauty of a young lady is deliberately made disgusting in order to scare Utayakumaran:

Look how her hair that once gleamed as black sand
Has now become but a stretch of white sand.
Don't you perceive how her moon-like forehead
Is now all grey, marked by lines of old age.
No more eye-lashes like a mighty bow;
Divided they are like dried up shrimp.
The lotus-like eyes water in sickness.
The lovely nose drips mucus constantly.
No more you see a smile with pearl-like teeth;
They are now uneven, dried up gourd seeds.
Whither the lips like silk-cotton flowers?

They now release the stench of rotten meat.
 The ears once lovely like *vallai* stem
 Have lost their flesh, and are mere dried-up skin.
 No more you see the proud uprising breasts.
 They hang loose and limp like bags grown empty.
 Those same shoulders that were like bamboo stems
 Are now bent like the coconut palm leaves.
 Look at the shrivelled fingers whose skin has
 Divorced blood-vessels, and their nails hang limp.
 The thighs that once rivaled plantain stems
 Are now but the dried stems of the screw-pine.
 Don't you see the once desirable shins
 Now ugly with blood-vessels and bones visible?
 Watch the feet that were tender in beauty
 Now ugly like dried-up coconut seeds (XX 41-66).

The traditional comparisons of a woman's limbs from head to foot are presented by Cāttanār with an ironic twist as he juxtaposes another set of comparisons of his own to highlight the contrast.

It is more as a repository of Buddhist logic, ethics and philosophy than as an artistic success that *Maṇimēkalai* is remembered today. And the author would have certainly felt rewarded by this kind of recognition accorded to his work. There are several episodes in the poem revealing his hatred of religions other than Buddhism. He was too enthusiastic a Buddhist to care for other cults. Jainism very often becomes his butt of ridicule. In Canto 4, the story of Cutamati, whose father's sufferings are alleviated by a large-hearted Buddhist Bhikshu, depicts a few callous Jain ascetics. In Canto 13, through Āputra, the author denounces Hindu scriptures, vedic sacrifices and Brahmins.

Cāttan is seen as an expert in both orthodox and heterodox systems of Indian philosophy and as an able apostle of Buddhist philosophy in Cantos 27, 29 and 30, where *Maṇimēkalai* is supposed to make an in-depth study of Saivavāda, Vaishnavavāda, Brahnavāda, Vēdavāda, Bhūtavāda and also Jainism and Buddhism. Cāttan chooses a woman for this purpose to drive home the point that the Buddha gave woman an independent status and placed her on a footing of equality with man. When Buddhism attained its peak of glory in Tamilnadu, Buddhist sisterhoods must have been very common. Praising *Therigātha* a work containing verses ascribed to bhikshunis, Dr. Rhys Davies observes:

A good many of these verses are not only beautiful in form but also give evidence of a very high degree of that mental self-culture which played so great a part in the Buddhist ideal of the perfect life. Many of the women who joined the order became distinguished for high intellectual attainments as well as for moral earnestness. Some women of acknowledged culture are represented not only as being the teachers of men and as expounding the deeper and subtler points of the Dharma, but also as having attained the Great Peace which is the final result of intellectual illumination and moral earnestness.¹²

In Cāttan's work, this supreme position is achieved by a woman from a clan of courtesans. He gives a lucid and profound exposition of Buddhist logic in Canto 29. Stcherbatsky feels that Hinayana Buddhists knew little about logical science. Maitreya and the learned brothers Asanga and Vasubandu, the founders of the Yogacara school of Buddhism, were the first great Buddhist theologians who showed interest in logic and epistemology. Cāttan proves to be very well acquainted with the writings of Nagarjuna, Maitreya, Asanga, Vasubandu, Dinnaga and others in his treatise on Buddhist logic, which running to more than 400 lines contains the quintessence of their writings. The close resemblance between *Nyayapravesa* and what Cāttan says is striking. But a scrutiny of the two by scholars reveals that the poet is more an interpreter than a mere translator of *Nyayapravesa* since he elucidates, illustrates and at times makes changes for the better.¹³ The Madhyamika school of Mahayana Buddhism spoke of four pramanas or sources of knowledge: perception, inference, comparison and testimony. The Yogacara school of the later period admitted only two pramanas – perception and inference. Vasubandu's contention was that these two pramanas are enough to understand and communicate knowledge. Cāttan accepts this view. While presenting the five-membered syllogism of the Naiyayikas, he follows the *Nyayasāstra* of Aksapada and its earliest commentary by Vatsyayana, according to which the five instruments of knowledge are thesis, reason, example, application and conclusion. *Maṇimēkalai* deals elaborately with the first three limbs of syllogism and concludes that the last two may be included in the third, whereas *Nyayapravesa* does not mention the last two. Cāttan lists nine fallacies of thesis, fourteen fallacies of reason and ten fallacies of example. *Nyayapravesa* mentions the same, while in the other logical treatises written before and after these two writers, the numbers vary.

In the last canto of *Maṇimēkalai*, in which there is a stunning display of Cāttan's knowledge of Buddhism gathered from a large number of Pali and Sanskrit texts, philosophy may not come "as felt thought in the proper emotional context". Perhaps Cāttan's intention is to write a manual on Buddhist philosophy in elegant Tamil and he has eminently succeeded in that attempt. The canto examines the theory of Dependent Origination and Four Noble Truths, the themes of the Sermon that the Buddha delivered at the Deer Park in Benares. Cāttan uses Nagarjuna's elucidation of the twelve Nidānas in *Mūlamādhyamika Kārika* in terms of a series of negatives.

There is neither origination (utpāda) nor cessation (ucchēda), neither permanence (sāsvata), nor impermanence (nirodha), neither unity (ekārtha) nor diversity (nānārtha), neither coming in (agamana) nor going out (niragamana) in the principle, pratitāya samutpāda.

The following twelve nidānās are mentioned by Cāttan: 1. ignorance, 2. dispositions, 3. consciousness, 4. name and form, 5. six spheres of operation, 6. sense contact, 7. feeling, 8. craving, 9. clinging, 10. becoming, 11. birth, 12. disease, old age and death. His presentation of how these operate is very similar to the description in "Mahavagga" of *Vinaya Pitaka*. He points out very effectively that if the origination of the twelve nidānās lodges one in bondage, the cessation of them gains one liberation. The Buddhist scholars of Cāttan's time had examined the nidānās from different points of view. The circle of nidānās is divided into four groups on the basis of cause and effect. They are also studied in terms of the three connections found among the four groups. The third analysis is grounded on the concept of three lives since the chain of the twelve nidānās extends over three lives, the past, the present and the future. In the fourth analysis, they are grouped under the three elements of casual law, viz., delusion, action and misery. Cāttan explains all the four analyses.

What Canto 30 gives is a succinct summary of Buddhist philosophy, meant for the common reader. Always keeping in mind the note of warning sounded by the Buddha against metaphysical subtleties, Cāttan never misses the wood for the trees. But the question that has been raised time and again by a number of Tamil scholars concerns the identity of the Buddhist school extolled by Cāttan, since the author himself does not mention which of the eighteen sects falling under the two main divisions of Hinayana and Mahayana he has in mind. Those who claim that Cāttan is an ardent supporter of Sauthrāntika Yogacāra, a Mahayana sect promoted by the disciples of

Vasubandhu, argue that Cāttan's work resounds with echoes from leading Mahayana texts like *Buddha Carita*, *Lalitavistara*, and *Lankavatara Sutra*. He says that numerous Buddhas who were avatārs of God lived in the past. Like Ashvaghosha, he also describes the good omens at the time of Buddha's birth. Inspired by Matr̥ceta's Hymn of Four Hundred Verses (Catuh-Sataka Stotra) and Hymn of 150 Verses (Satapancastika Stotra), he has included a few hymns of his own in which the various names and appellations of the Buddha are recounted.¹⁴ As in the Mahayana texts, Buddha is referred to as the sun in many places. The arhats of Hinayana are unsocial recluses interested in setting their own lands in order whereas the Bodhisattvas of Mahayana are saviours of mankind. The portraits of Aravaṇa Aṭikaḷ and Āputtiraṇ indicate that Cāttanār's sympathies are with the cult of Bodhisattva. In *Maṇimēkalai*, there are indirect references to the system of Buddha's tri-kāyā, (Dharma, Sambhoga and Nirmāṇā Kāyās), a salient feature of Mahayana Buddhism.

Those who believe that Cāttan champions the cause of Hinayana point out that his repeated tributes to the path of the pitakas of the Great One must be a reference to Hinayana. In the temple at Puhar, the Buddha was represented only by his feet. Also there are no allusions to the Madhyamika school or to Nagarjuna anywhere in the text.

What the historians have to say about Buddhism in the Tamil country may help us resolve the controversy. Sir Charles Eliot categorically states that "our available documents indicate that the Buddhism of South India was almost entirely Hinayanist, analogous to that of Ceylon."¹⁵ Hiuen Tsang, who visited India in the 7th century, writes that in Dravida there were 10,000 monks of the *Sthavira* school. Though a zealous Mahayanist, he says that half the monks of India were definitely Hinayanist while less than a fifth had equally definite Mahayanist convictions. The Sthaviras, Sarvastivadins and Sammitiyas are the three Hinayanist schools frequently mentioned. The Sthaviras, the well-known Ceylonese sect, were found chiefly in the South and in East Bengal.

These historical details make it clear that the Buddhism of *Maṇimēkalai* has to be Hinayana, the dominant school in the South even as late as the 7th century. Then how are we to account for the presence of some Mahayanist principles in it? Sir Charles Eliot says that the Sautrantikas, though accounted Hinayanists, mark a step in the direction of Mahayana, since they not only ascribed superhuman powers to the Buddha, but believed in the doctrine of the three bodies. Like most of the Hinayanists of his time, Cāttan was

not averse to using some of the Mahayanist principles to demonstrate the superiority of Buddhism over other religions.

The propagation of Buddhism is the chief motive of *Maṇimēkalai*. The three Cantos which discuss religious doctrines may be cut out without causing any damage to the artistic integrity of the work. It is religious literature only in the third sense in which T.S. Eliot uses the term, i.e., the work of a man who sincerely wants to forward the cause of a religion. And it must have succeeded as propaganda literature, since its example was followed by a few great Tamil writers of the time. Unfortunately, it cannot be considered religious literature in the sense of devotional poetry like the writings of Nayanmars and Alwars in Tamil or of Dante, Herbert, Vaughan and Hopkins. In Cantos 27, 29 and 30, philosophy remains as philosophy and does not become poetry. But if *Maṇimēkalai* fails as a poem, it fails only by the highest standards of art.

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¹For an account of the birth, growth and decline of Buddhism in Tamilnadu, see T.N. Vasudeva Rao, *Buddhism in the Tamil Country* (Annamalai Nagar: Annamalai University, 1979).

²Ibid., 280.

³Ibid., 282.

⁴Ibid., 306.

⁵The lyric no. 187 in *Puraṇānūru* by Avvaiyār is said to be an artistic rendering of verse no. 98 in *Dhammapada*, which means that the greatness of a country depends not on the nature of its terrain but on the goodness of the people. I have elsewhere shown that this view is based on a misunderstanding of the Buddhist verse.

⁶For a comparative study of *Tirukkuraḷ* and *Dhammapada*, see Taṇinayāka Aṭikaḷ, *Tiruvalluvar*. Annamalai Nagar: Annamalai University, 1967.

⁷Kandaswamy, S.N. *Buddhism as Expounded in Maṇimēkalai*. Annamali Nagar: Annamalai University, 1978, 27.

⁸Saminathaier, U.V. is of the opinion that *Maṇimēkalai* was written in the 2^d century A.D. But most modern scholars would assign it to the 6th century A.D. For a brief discussion of its date, see K.V. Zvelebil, *Tamil Literature*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974, 141.

⁹It is noted in the *Mahavamsa* and I-Tsing's "Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago" that the Buddha's miraculous alms-bowl

came under the possession of great men in different parts of India and Ceylon.

¹⁰ K.V. ZVELEBIL. *Tamil Literature*, 141.

¹¹ Prof. S. KUPPUSWAMI SASTRI'S "Problems of Identity in the Cultural History of India – Aṟavaṇa Aṭigal" in *the Journal of Oriental Research*, 1927, 191-201 and K.G. Sesha Iyer's "The Date of Maṇimēkalai" in *the Journal of Oriental Research*, 1927, 322-24 are worth reading.

¹² P. LAKSHMI NARASU. *The Essence of Buddhism*. Delhi: Bharatiya Publishing House, 1976, 120.

¹³ For a detailed discussion of Buddhist philosophy as revealed in *Maṇimēkalai*, see S.K. Krishnaswamy Iyengar, *Maṇimēkalai in its Historical Setting*. London, 1928, S.N. Kandaswamy, *Buddhism as Expounded in Manimekalai*, and N. Vanamamalai, "Manimekalaiyin Buddham" in *Tamilar Paṇpāṭum Tattuvamum, Madras: New Century Book House*, 1973.

¹⁴ MATRCETA was a famous Buddhist poet patronized by Kanishka. Cāttaṇ's hymn praising the feet of the Buddha is found in Canto XI.

¹⁵ SIR CHARLES ELIOT. *Hinduism and Buddhism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1921, II, 96.

The English rendering of the long passage contrasting an old crone with a young lady (XX 41-66) is from Prema Nandakumar, tr. *Maṇimēkalai*, Thanjavur: Tamil University, 1989. All the other quotations from the epic were translated by me.

19. RELATIONS AS SHACKLES: A.K. RAMANUJAN AND CAṆKAM POEMS

It is well-known that A.K. Ramanujan has won global recognition and great critical acclaim for the ancient poems of love, war and bhakti in Tamil through his English renderings of a considerable number of them. What is little known to his readers and critics is the extent to which classical Tamil poetry has had its impact on his original English poems. The celebrated Caṅkam poems have exerted a strong, almost all pervasive influence on his subject, imagery, poetic technique, thought and vision of life. Even as early as 1970, in one of his interviews with a young Indian critic, he acknowledged his unqualified admiration for Caṅkam poetry:

These classical Tamil poems attracted me by their attitude to experience, to human passion, and to the external world, their trust in the bareness, the lean line with no need to jazz it up or ornament it. They seemed to me classical, anti-romantic, using the words loosely as we know them in European literature. ... Look at the classical Tamil poems, their attention to experience. Yet their attention to the object is not to create the 'object' of the Imagist, but the object as enacting human experience: the scene always a part of the human scene, the poetry of objects always a part of the human perception of self and others. ... The ability to engage entirely the world of things, animals, trees, and people, attending to their particularity, making poetry out of it and making them speak for you – this seems to me extraordinary. ... But the ancient Tamils were a community, a 'Caṅkam' of poets, with a symbolism and a reality they shared. Not a fabulous mythology but the realities of nature and culture used as a symbolism, a language within a language which allowed them to write with tremendous economy and allusiveness. Describe a drumbeat or falling water or a wildcat's row of teeth; one little thing could say many things. If the world was the vocabulary of the poet, convention was his syntax (2000:46).

As he translated more and more of Caṅkam poetry, he was drawn closer and closer to it and its worldview, as opposed to the one in Sanskrit literature, appealed to him all the more effectively. Describing his early

reaction against Hinduism, he asserts that he came to believe that “only a kind of modern rationalism was the answer to all the problems of a hierarchy of birth.” He would never translate the Vedas because his interest had always been in the mother tongues, not Sanskrit since he always felt that the mother tongues represent a democratic, anti-hierarchic, from-the-ground-up view of India. He decided not to talk about India through the Sanskrit texts, but through the mother tongue texts, both written and oral – not India “as seen through some epic like the *Ramayana* – which are told by women, by the non-literate part of the population”. He preferred the folk-tales in regional languages to the Sanskrit mythologies because the three things in which he was constantly interested – the aesthetics, the past, the worldview – are given importance only in the folk-tales, not in the mythologies in which one hears only the official views.

He openly declares that he was “ideologically radical towards Sanskrit.”

My discovery over the years is that the mother tongues have so much in them, so much that is alive, and are much more pervasive, in all strata of society, in all ages from children to the very old, men and women, literate and non-literate. What holds them together? It's not Sanskrit. It's these mother tongues (2000:62).

He insists on our recognizing that Caṅkam poetry is very different from what is commonly known as Indian poetry.

When I first published these poems in *The Interior Landscape*, there were Indian friends of mine, and people who knew Indian poetry well, who knew the whole tradition of Sanskrit... they all said to me, ‘This cannot be Indian poetry.’ It looked so different from anything they had ever seen. It was not flamboyant. It didn't have all those hyperbolic and formulaic restrictions on women, and so on (2000:64).

He confesses that when he started translating the Caṅkam poems he found that there were many that he would have liked to have written himself and that he did not translate out of love but out of envy, out of a kind of aggression towards them.

William Walsh contends that A.K. Ramanujan is too deeply possessed of the Indian ethos and psyche in its pure Hindu form to be capable of the detachment from the Indian scene that Nissim Ezekiel is capable of. The learned critic fails to realize that in Ezekiel's case, because of his Jewish

heritage vis-à-vis Indian background, the dominant theme is a search for roots, a quest for identity, whereas in Ramanujan's case, it is an agonizing struggle with one's deep-rooted past. Also, as Bruce King has pointed out, Ramanujan does show remarkable objectivity and detachment inasmuch as he proves to be neither a nostalgic traditionalist nor an advocate of modernization and westernization. In fact, Ramanujan's concern with his Indian past is a source of strength for, one would do well to remember, as D.H. Lawrence has stated in a different context, "All creative art must rise out of a specific soil and flicker with a spirit of place" (Peeradina, 1972: xi). Ramanujan had the added advantage of being equally at home in two Indian languages with rich literatures to their credit, namely, Tamil and Kannada. Commenting on "Prayers to Lord Muruga," Parthasarathy rightly says that it can be established and kept alive only if Indian English verse increasingly aligns itself with the literatures of India.

Ramanujan has himself confessed that English and his disciplines (linguistics, anthropology) give him his "outer" forms – linguistic, metrical, logical, and other such ways of shaping experience, while his first thirty years in India, his frequent visits and field trips, his preoccupations with Kannada, Tamil, the classics and folklore give him his substance, his "inner forms," images, symbols (Naik 1982:199-200). But classical Tamil literature has done to Ramanujan much more than what he and his critics have hitherto acknowledged.

As soon as he stumbled upon an early anthology of classical Tamil poems, edited by U.Ve. Caminataiyar in the then Harper Library of the University of Chicago, Ramanujan understood their greatness and value:

As I began to read on, I was enthralled by the beauty and subtlety of what I could read. Here was a world, a part of my language and culture, to which I had been an ignorant heir. Until then, I had only heard of the idiot in the Bible who had gone looking for a donkey and had happened upon a kingdom (1985: xvii).

The response of this Chicago-trained Professor of Linguistics to a group of Tamil religious poems ten years later was no less enthusiastic:

In 1976, in the subzero sun of a Minnesota winter, I read and reread the *Tiruvoymozhi* with care and these ancient poems came alive for me (1981: xvii).

Driven by inner compulsion rather than monetary or other considerations, he started Englishing the poems he admired and brought them out in collections such as *Fifteen Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology*, *The Interior Landscape*, *Hymns for the Drowning* and *Poems of Love and War*. Their success was astounding and all the earlier versions of these poems by native scholars paled into insignificance. He has an edge over them as his command of the English idiom is masterly and knowledge of contemporary western audience and their taste unmatched. His own original poems in English also made their appearance periodically in journals and anthologies though with moderate success and leading to the common verdict that translation was his forte. It is not known if he himself was aware of the full impact that those small Tamil poems had on his poetic thought, imagery and even style.

The epigraph-poem that Ramanujan has chosen for his second collection, *Relations*, released in 1971, indicated that he wanted to make it clear that the poems included in the volume have drawn their sustenance from what the Tamil poem connotes. He renders the *Puranānūru* piece into English as follows:

Like a hunted deer
 On the wide white
 Salt land
 a flayed hide
 turned inside out
 One may run
 escape.
 But living
 among relations
 binds the feet. (1985: 163)

The Tamil poet says that the life with one's kith and kin will fetter one's legs whereas to redeem oneself one has to run away from them just as a hunted deer, in order to escape, has to cross a long white stretch of wet-soiled, slippery land resembling the peeled skin placed inside out. For every individual, it is going to be an ordeal either way. In the poems that follow, Ramanujan articulates his recollections of life with his mother, father, aunts and uncles from whose clutches he has escaped but not without risking everything.

Ramanujan believes in writing in images though he knows it is a hit-

and-miss affair, subject to change. Images are in God's plenty in the Caṅkam poems and their variety, subtlety and sophistication are equally amazing. Many of these ancient poets are now known by the striking images they have employed. As Ramanujan himself remarks, using a Caṅkam poet's metaphor, the poems are not the result of rapid composition like oral epics, but of subtle care and reworking:

Like a chariot wheel
made thoughtfully
over a month
by a carpenter
who tosses off eight chariots
in a day" (1985:273).

The Tamil poets' minute and accurate observations of the fauna and flora of the five Tamil regions are reflected in the images they use. That Ramanujan's mind is full of them is evident in his poetry.

In a celebrated *Kuruntokai* poem, Kapilar describes a heron looking for fish in the running waters:

Only the thief was there, no one else.
and if he should lie, what can I do?
There was only
 a thin-legged heron standing
 on legs yellow as millet stems
 and looking
 for lampreys
 in the running water
 when he took me. (1985: 17)

In Ramanujan's "Looking and Finding" herons make their appearance:

"He can neither sleep nor wake from the one-legged sleep on this Chicago lake of yachts in full sail, herons playing at sages" (1986:75)

But it is in "The Striders" that Kapilar's description is superbly evoked, herons being replaced by striders.

And search
for certain thin-

stemmed, bubble-eyed water bugs.
 See them perch
 on dry capillary legs
 weightless
 on the ripple skin
of a stream (1976:1)

In another *Kuruntokai* poem, a young heroine wonders if there are others like her, sick for love, spending sleepless nights and hearing

Through the big rain
 blown about by the wind
 at midnight in the cold month
 when the oxen
 shake off the buzzing flies
 again and again
 the poor thin chime
 of clappers
in the crooked cowbells? (1985: 73)

Oxen yield place to buffaloes more than once in similar descriptions in Ramanujan's poems.

I return from the wide open spaces.
 Temple employees have whiskered nipples.
 The streetcows have trapezium faces.
Buffaloes shake off flies with twitch of ripples.
 (Smalltown, South India)

Three women with baskets
 on their heads, climbing
 slowly against the slope
 of a hill, one of them
 lop-sided, balancing
between the slope and
 the basket on the head
 a late pregnancy.
 Buffaloes swatting flies
 with their tails.
 (Poona Train Window)

A *Narrinai* heroine describes the fishermen “who go from the little town in the seaside groves into the sea ...spreading and drying meanwhile their nets with many eyes and knots” (1985: 46). In Ramanujan’s “Love poem for a Wife 2” this becomes a beautiful image to describe the past:

Unhappy in the morning
To be himself again
The past still there
A drying
Net on the mountain...

The story goes that the Tamils were able to make extraordinarily thin muslin cloth when the Westerners had not even started wearing clothes. Similes in which muslin, waterfalls, snakeskins and steam are compared with one another abound in ancient and medieval Tamil poems. The great Kamban, for instance, compares the single piece of cloth that Sita was wearing with a cloud of steam. Ramanujan uses all these with acknowledgement!

We eat legends and leavings,
remember the ivory, the apes,
the peacocks we sent in the Bible
to Solomon, the medicines for smallpox
the similes
for muslin: wavering snakeskins,
a cloud of steam.
(Prayers to Lord Murugan)

And then one sometimes sees waterfalls
as the ancient Tamils saw them
wavering snakeskins,
cascades of muslin.
(Waterfalls in a Bank)

One of the *Purāṇānūru* poems describes a king’s prosperity in terms of the tuskers he possesses comparing them with cows and stones with buffaloes.

You are the lord of the land,
In whose forest, elephants roam

Like a huge herd of cows
Amidst buffalo-like dark stones (*Puranānūru* 5).

The buffalo-stone comparison is to be found in other Tamil poems like *Malaipaṭukatām* also. Ramanajun comes out with a modified version of it in “A River”.

the wet stones glistening like sleepy
crocodiles, the dry ones
shaven water-buffaloes lounging in the sun.

A *kuruntokai* heroine claims that her love for a man of the mountain slopes is bigger than earth, higher than the sky and more unfathomable than the sea. In an exquisite piece on anxiety Ramanujan’s reworking of this set of comparisons attains remarkable success.

Flames have only lungs. Water is all eyes.
The earth has bone for muscle. And the air
is a flock of invisible pigeons.
But anxiety
Can find no metaphor to end it.

Rmanujan’s creative adaptations of Caṅkam lyrics and his conscious/unconscious borrowings from them reveal his admiration for classical Tamil poetry. There are poems by him which articulate his annoyance, agony and even anger at any uncritical acceptance of tradition in matters religious, secular or aesthetic. He wants contemporary poets, modern as well as postmodern, to be true to their experience. In a note on his English renderings of selections from *Paripāṭal*, a late classical anthology of poems on Murukan, Tirumal and Vaikai, he points out that “the poems in *Paripāṭal* on Tirumal and Murukan are the earliest bhakti poems in India, the earliest religious poems in a mother tongue”. Each of the eight musical compositions on the Maturai river Vaikai (earlier known as Vaiyai), describes, in an almost set pattern, the river in roaring spate, the procession of men and women rushing to enjoy the sight and to bathe, the play of young couples in the river, the brief fits of sulks of young ladies and the reconciliations with their lovers and finally, the grandeur of the river. In Ramanujan’s “A River”, the celebrated Vaiyai becomes anonymous and ‘dries to a trickle in the sand’, the romantic scenes are replaced by tragic occurrences and the present generation of bards totally blind to reality are castigated:

The new poets still quoted
the old poets, but no one spoke
in verse
of the pregnant woman
drowned with perhaps twins in her,
kicking at blank walls
even before birth.

The best known poem of *kuruntokai*, which Ramanujan has translated with admirable skill, glorifies love at first sight, love between total strangers:

What could my mother be
To yours? What kin is my father
To yours anyway? And how
Did you and I meet ever?
But in love
Our hearts have mingled
Like red earth and pouring rain (1985: xi)

But the modern poet's experience of love and wedded life calls for a totally different evocation of family relationships.

Really what keeps us apart
at the end of years is unshared
childhood. You cannot, for instance,
meet my father. He is some years
dead. Neither can I meet yours:
he has lately lost his temper
and mellowed.

The bond between brother and sister seems to be stronger than the one between man and wife. The absence of shared childhood may even threaten the harmony of marital life.

Probably
Only the Egyptians had it right;
their kings had sisters for queens
to continue the incests
of childhood into marriage.

Ramanujan's reaction to the past becomes almost hysterical where religious sentiments are concerned. *Tirumurukārruppaṭai*, another late classical Tamil poem, is modeled upon an *Arruppaṭai* or guide poem of the

Caṅkam period in which one bard leads another to a philanthropist-chieftain. In the religious poem by Nakkīrar, it is the devotees of Lord Murukan who are guided to the holy places associated with him. Expressing his undoubted admiration for the poem, Ramanujan says,

The six sections of the Guide to Murukan celebrate six holy places, which are identified with His six faces, thus making Tamil country the body of the god. In this poetic act, the poem, the god, and the country become homologues of one another. This long poem is the first great bhakti poem in Indian literature (1985:311).

Also he has translated the fifth and sixth sections of the poem, one on all the dwelling places of the god, the other on his dances. It is the fifth section, which, in Ramanujan's words, "evokes a community, joyous, erotic, dancing, with a shaman in their midst who wears the Red One's insignia (his lance, red robes) and becomes Him (1985: 311), that provokes the modern poet to come out with his uncharitable, indignant, at times undignified, attack on all the Hindus and their eccentricities. Several strange requests are made to the ancient Dravidian god of fertility, joy, youth, beauty, war and love.

Lord of headlines
 help us read
 the small print.
 Lord of the sixth sense,
 give us back
 our five senses.
 Lord of solutions
 teach us to dissolve
 and not to drown

 Deliver us O presence
 from proxies
 and absences
 from Sanskrit and the mythologies
 of night and the several
 roundtable mornings
 of London and return
 the future to what
 it was.
 Lord, return us.
 Bring us back
 to a litter

of six new pigs in a slum
and a sudden quarter of harvest

....

Lord of answers
cure us at once
of prayers.

The irreverence, the parody, the ironic juxtaposing of the sublime and the ridiculous, the series of paradoxes and the amusing and curious play with words make it a 'postmodernist' prayer though born of an ancient bhakti poem.

It is in her preface to the new edition (2006) of *Poems of Love and War* that Molly A. Daniels Ramanujan points out, though sketchily, Ramanujan's indebtedness to Caṅkam poetry for his own creativity:

As he continued to work on *Poems of Love and War*, his own poems began to be able to say the most complicated things with a minimum of words. He learned to draw on *place* and *time* and *person* in the best tradition of drawing from *akam* (interior) and *puṛam* (exterior) landscapes. He learned to use the telling detail from *time* and *place* to catch a dramatic situation in his own poems (ix).

The impact of the more than two thousand Caṅkam lyrics on Ramanujan's writings is to be seen not only in the choice of appropriate background, economy of diction, striking images and other techniques but in his vision of life also.

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20. PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATING *PURANĀNŪRU*

Hugh Kenner gives a noteworthy insight into translation when he observes,

That “poetry cannot be translated is a cliché begotten by romantic poetics, nourished by bad translation, and chiefly serviceable in apostrophes to ineffable poesy . . . it obviously applies to certain kinds of poetry and will seem as unshakable truism to anyone whose conception of poetry is limited to those kinds. The extent to which a poetic effect relies on the sound of words, or their tricks of context or association, is a measure of its resistance to the translating process; on the other hand, quite complicated structures of imagery will often metamorphose virtually intact and the gnomic and aphoristic can come through with remarkable force.

Any translator of a Caṅkam poem will have to blame himself, not the source or the target language, if his output fails to produce the desired effect and convey the greatness of the original. And he would do well to keep in mind Ezra Pound’s favourite dictum that of the three components of poetry, phanopoeia, melopoeia and logopoeia, the first can be translated, the second cannot and the third, though it is untranslatable, implies an attitude of mind which will very often pass through paraphrase. Caṅkam poems characterized by concision, striking imagery and rolling rhythms do present a great challenge to the translators who are determined to do full justice to all the three Poundian components of each of them.

The causes of failure of many translations, as identified by Hugh Kenner, are true of the English renderings of Caṅkam texts also:

1. Inadequate acquaintance with the original
2. Incompetence in managing the new language
3. unwillingness to leave anything out
4. uncertainty about why the original is worth translating
5. Unsuitable choice of idiom.

A close scrutiny of four or five poems of *Puranānūru* translated into

English by G.U.Pope, A.K.Ramanujan and G.L.Hart will bear this out.

The following piece from *Puranānūru* by Kaṇiyan Pūṅkuṇṇan is deservedly well-known for its cosmopolitan outlook:

Yātum ūrē yāvarum kēlir
 tītum nanrum piṛartara vārā
 nōtalum taṇitalum avarrōraṇṇa
 cātalum putuvatu anrē vāltal
 iṇitena makilntanrum ilamē minnoṭu
 vānam taṇtuli talaiyi ānātu
 kalpolutu iraṅkum mallalpēr yārru
 nīr vaḷippaṭum puṇaipōl āruyir
 murai vaḷippaṭūm eṇpatu tiravōr
 kāṭciyil telintaṇam ākaliṇ māṭciyin
 periyōrai viyattalum ilamē
 ciriyōrai ikaḷtal ataṇinum ilamē.

Expressing his admiration for the poem, G.U.Pope introduces it as one that might have been written prior to *Tirukkural* and may be compared with Kural No. 397 and stanza no. 116 of Paḷamoḷi. His rendering of the poem is in the form of an exquisite sonnet entitled "The Sages".

To us all towns are one, all men our kin,
 Life's good comes not from others' gift, nor ill;
 Man's pains and pains' relief are from within,
 Death's no new thing: nor do our bosoms thrill
 When joyous life seems like a luscious draught.
 When grieved, we patient suffer, for, we deem
 This much praised life of ours a fragile raft
 Borne down the waters of some mountain stream
 That o'er huge boulders roaring seeks the plain
 Tho'storms with lightning's flash from darken'd skies
 Descend, the raft goes on as fates ordain.
 Thus have we seen in visions of the wise!
 We marvel not at greatness of the great;
 Still less despise we men of low estate.

Pope has managed to convey almost all the ideas of the original in a Shakespearean Sonnet of three quatrains and a couplet rhyming abab, cdcd, efef, gg. The final sententious statement implying that we need not wonder at the great and should not denigrate the small is equally effectively conveyed in a technically demanding heroic couplet. The only instance where Pope's fondness for rhymes has very badly let him down is his

unwarranted introduction of a metaphor not found in the Tamil poem:

...nor do our bosoms thrill
When joyous life seems like a luscious draught;

In a desperate search for suitable rhymes for 'ill' and 'raft', he settles on 'thrill' and 'draught' ignoring the fact that life is not described as a delicious draught or in any other metaphorical terms. However, Pope's success in translating a poem from one language into another in rhymed verse is praiseworthy because, as Dryden himself warns, it is as risky and foolhardy as dancing on the rope with bound feet.

We may also congratulate Pope on his proper understanding of the entire poem for there is a prose rendering of the poem in which another Westerner has betrayed his lack of comprehension of some of the words and phrases in the poem despite the availability of old and new commentaries. J.R.Marr's rendering runs as follows:

All villages are mine and every one my friend
I receive wrong doing as though it were good,
and do not pay it back. Pain and relief
from pain are as one. To die is not new,
while not to rejoice because life is
sweet is absurd. Poor is the mind that holds it wrong
to seek after something. The cool drops of rain
that fall with the lightning's flash are not the same as it is. Like the
waters of the stream that rushes
among rocks is sweet life, set down on the pre-ordained
path. Since this has clearly been foreseen by
the wise it is foolish to extol the greatness of
The great or to censure the lowly.

In a very condescending paraphrase not free from mistakes, all the profound thoughts subtly expressed in the poem are turned into what may appear to be platitudes to the readers who are not familiar with the original. "tītum nanṛum piṛar tara vāra" doesn't mean "I receive wrong doing as though it were good". There is a gulf of difference between "nōtalum taṇitalum avarṛoranna" and "pain and relief from pain are as one". No reader, even if he knows the Tamil poem, will understand what the English translator means by "The cool drops of rain that fall with the lightning's flash are not the same as it is". The raft image is lost in the elucidation of

it as attempted by Marr. The arrogance evident in the last statement of the translation is against the very spirit of the poem whose author won't be interested in chiding or condemning anyone that follows a path different from the one that he describes. It is gratifying that the translator who has bungled the whole thing hasn't attempted a verse translation.

A.K.Ramajujan, whose mother tongue is Tamil and who is equally at home in English, is naturally expected to do a much better job than even G.U. Pope. Scrupulously avoiding the Victorian English of the learned don, the Indian translator chooses today's English, his forte.

Every town our home town.
 Every man a kinsman.
 Good and evil do not come
 from others.
 Pain and relief of pain
 come of themselves.
 Dying is nothing new,
 We do not rejoice
 that life is sweet
 nor in anger
 call it bitter.
 Our lives, however dear
 follow their own course
 rafts drifting
 in the rapids of a great river
 sounding and dashing over the rocks
 after a downpour
 from skies slashed by lightnings –
 We know this
 from the vision
 of men who see.
 So,
 We are not amazed by the great,
 and we don't scorn the little.

Ramanujan, himself no mean poet in English, has a greater achievement to his credit as translator and it is largely through his efforts that Caṅkam poetry has now acquired a global reputation. As might be expected, he has articulated his principles of translation in more than one essay. Recommending, like Dryden, the middle way between literal translation and imitation, he states that “items are more difficult to translate than relations, textures more difficult than structures, words more difficult than

phrasing, linear order more difficult than syntax, lines more difficult than pattern.” Keeping in mind the characteristic strategies that he employs, he contends that “the sound look, the syntax, the presence and absence of punctuation, and the sequential design are part of the effort to bring the Tamil poems faithfully to an English reader.” When it comes to actual practice, besides these sophisticated techniques, he relies on copious explanatory notes and a scholarly Afterword. But no translator can foresee all the obstacles and arm himself with all the required ready-made weapons when the two languages happen to be as bewilderingly different from each other as classical Tamil and modern English.

Ramanujan’s triumph here, as elsewhere, is dazzling. He is able to bring out the full meaning of the Tamil poem without any distortion in flawless English, using more alliterations than rhymes and making the latter as inconspicuous as possible. The foregrounding of the raft metaphor, described in five short lines, is achieved through spacing. But Ramanujan’s rendering of the final ideal of the poem, though appearing to have been managed admirably in two lines of mostly monosyllabic words, is not as close to the original as Pope’s couplet which, though using rhymes, drives home the message that scorning the little should be more scrupulously shunned than even admiring the great.

When George L. Hart brought out his translation of the entire anthology of *Puraṇānūru*, he had a definite edge over others inasmuch as a lot of pioneering work by way of translation and scholarly commentary relating to Caṅkam classics was readily available to him. Compared to Pope’s task, his was extremely easy; what was a challenge to the former must have been a labour of love to the latter. Another great advantage Hart had was the service rendered by Hank Heifetz, one trained in the art of writing poetry, to whom was entrusted the task of transmuting Hart’s prose into poetry. A native speaker of English, his love for Tamil and knowledge of Sanskrit and Tamil literatures have certainly endowed Hart with the needed intellectual and emotional background. It is with great expectations that we approach this collaborative endeavour. They would have certainly devoted considerable attention to the 192^d poem of *Puraṇānūru* which receives high praise in their introduction.

Every city is your city. Everyone is your kin
Failure and prosperity do not come to you because others
have sent them! Nor do suffering and the end of suffering.
There is nothing new in death. Thinking that living

is sweet, we do not rejoice in it. Even less do we say,
 if something unwanted happens, that to live is miserable!
 Through the vision of those who have understood we know
 that a life, with its hardship, makes its way like a raft
 riding the water of a huge and powerful river roaring
 without pause as it breaks against rocks because the clouds
 crowded with bolts of lightning pour down their cold
 drops of the rain, and so we are not amazed
 At those who are great and even less do we despise the weak!

Heifetz observes that “the Tamil language runs like a river—long words, rapid speech, accumulating syllables – and these translations (sometimes straining against the bounds of English syntax) attempt to communicate the feel of these rolling rhythms”. (Hart xiii)

We have reason to believe that he has in mind Ramanujan’s renderings which, opting for some of the techniques of contemporary English poetry, completely ignore the rhythm of the original Tamil pieces which prefer long rolling sentences thereby contributing to what Milton the great musician poet calls “link’d sweetness long drawn out”. Ramanujan’s strength as well as weakness being his predilection for breaking the meandering sentence in the Tamil poem into short striking phrases and sentences, its rhythm becomes the first casualty.

But the poem under discussion opens with six short sentences followed by a long sentence echoing the rhythm of a drifting raft in the waters of a turbulent river. This pattern is more or less retained in Hart’s translation. Whereas Marr in his ambitious attempt to give in prose the entire content of the poem as briefly as possible has mauled and marred it. Hart is interested more in clarity of expression than in brevity and hence succeeds in retaining the full import of the poem though at the expense of poetic beauty. The term “āruyir” is translated by Ramanujan as “our lives, however dear” while, to Hart and Heifetz, it means “a life, with its hardship”. This itself is symptomatic of the difference in their approaches one desiring to be as modern as possible and the other as faithful to the original as possible. Of all the four translations, it is Hart’s which is closest to the original in meaning achieving as much of clarity as possible. But, unfortunately, despite the conscious efforts by Heifetz, his rendering is not as aesthetically gratifying as Ramanujan’s or even Pope’s. Of the three renderings of the final two lines, Pope’s succeeds most in poetically conveying the subtle nuances manifest in the original.

Of the handful of stray pieces which deviate from the rest of *Puranānūru* with regard to the subject matter of war and fame, two by Mārpittiyār, a woman poet, deserve our attention from the translators' point of view. The colophons state that both may be brought under the classification of *Tāpata Vākai*, which is supposed to speak of the greatness of ascetic discipline. The first pictures a fighter turned ascetic and the second a charmer turned ascetic, both being short pieces, subtly textured and the more puzzling to the translators than the former.

karanku vellaruvi ērralin nīram peyarntu
tillai anṇa pulleṇ caṭaiyōṭu
aḷḷilaittāli koyyumōnē
ilvalaṅku maṭamayil piṇikkum
colvalai vēṭṭuvan āyiṇaṇ munṇē

Stating that both describe a king turned ascetic, G.U. Pope translates the second piece as follows:

Amid the roaring cataracts he makes his way;
His hue is changed; his locks are brown as *Tillai* buds
He plucks the creeper's sacred flowers. But erst he wove
The net of courtly words that took the simple hearts
Of the fair maidens in his stately palace-home.

There is no hint anywhere in the poem or in the old commentaries enabling us to conclude that the one presently leading a life of renunciation was once a king. Assuming the hero of the poem to be a king, Pope takes 'il' (Il-house) as palace-home, though there is no warrant for it. Ignoring some of the complex epithets he translates 'karanku vellaruvi' as 'sounding cataract'; Pulleṇ caṭai' as 'locks' and 'aḷḷilaittāli' as 'sacred flowers'. From the central metaphor, the net is retained but the peacocks are replaced by what they stand for, fair maidens!

The first of the two poems on the ascetic is titled 'A Charmer Turned Ascetic' and the second "A Hunter Once, Now an Ascetic" by Ramanujan. His rendering of the second poem leaves us in doubt as to his understanding of the interpretation of the hunter-metaphor.

Bathing in the roaring white waterfall
has changed his colour.
His matted locks are brown leaves

on a blinding tree,
and he is now plucking for food
A bunch of thick leaves
from a bindweed.

He was a hunter once
He had a net
of words,
and he caught peacocks
that wandered innocently
into his yard.

In his Afterword, he mentions that in his translation 'tillai' is called 'blinding tree' and 'tāli' 'bindweed'. But he doesn't indicate if the hero of his poem is a hunter in a literal or metaphoric sense. While he describes the net as a net of words, which is but a faithful translation of *colvalai*, he doesn't tell us if what are caught are maidens or peacocks. The doubt is reasonable because if he had taken the peacocks to be maidens, he would have certainly called the poem "A Hunter of Women Once, Now an Ascetic". Since the Tamil original has no such misleading title, the metaphoric 'colvalai vēṭṭuvan' naturally leads us to interpret 'ilvalaṅku maṭamayil' also metaphorically. In Ramanujan's poem, there appears a strange hunter who catches the peacocks that wander into his house in a net of words!

Hart, in his translation, manages to narrate a short story regarding the past of the protagonist of the poem as he takes all the charitable interpretations into consideration and desires to make it clear that the hero was not at all a womaniser in the past.

His matted hair wan as new leaves of a *tillai* tree, bleached by the white roaring water fall, he plucks the leaves from a dense growth of *tāli* bushes, who to capture the woman that now lives in his house, and is as lovely as a peacock without guile, would go hunting with a net of words in days gone by!

Though 'tillai' is translated *tillai* tree and *tāli* bushes here, the footnote gives the required details and adds that the saint might have eaten the *tāli* leaves to suppress his hunger. But the crux of the matter relates to the interpretation of the last two lines. In Hart's consideration of the poem, the hero has played the role of a hunter with a net of words only once and that too to catch the maid that has now become his wife!

The author of the two poems, presumably a woman, expresses her wonder at the transformation of a young man who was once a fighter capable of captivating the hearts of young women by his heroic deeds and a pleasing conversationalist who could beguile them by his charming words. Characterised by psychological realism, the two poems together as well as independently create an uncommon human being whose dramatic change in personality would amaze anyone who has closely observed his life. We do come across people in real life who may suddenly shift from theism to atheism or from agnosticism to renunciation. Mārpittiyār has eminently succeeded in creating such a character in the two poems by painting four dramatic scenes:

1. Young maids fall in love with him because of his deed on the battle field and as they pine for love their bangles slip from their arms.
2. After bathing in a mountain stream, an ascetic is drying his hair.
3. A hunter with a net of words catches peacocks that wander into his courtyard.
4. An ascetic is plucking tāḷi leaves after bathing in a roaring waterfall.

A translator would have done his job if he had recaptured these four scenes faithfully. There is no need to surmise if the protagonist was a king or a hunter or the one with whom the poet herself was in love and if the peacock refers to his present wife. All these details are not required for the character portrayed to have its full impact on us or for the reenactment of the four scenes in our mind's stage. It is to be noticed that even without giving these details, the poet has been able to create a live male character who is typical as well as individual. The wise old commentator of *Puranānūru* has observed that both the poems express the speaker's wonder at the present state of a particular individual whose antecedents are known to her. For the translator of the poem, there is no need to go beyond that and hazard a conjecture about the character's superficial identity.

A short poem by Veripāṭiya kāmakkanniyār, in order to celebrate a fighter's heroism, juxtaposes an *akattiṇai* and a *purattiṇai* scene.

nīraṇavu aṇiyā nilamutal kalanta
karuṅkural noccik kaṇṇār kūrūut taḷai
mellilai makaḷir aitakaḷ alkuḷ
toḷaḷai ākavum kaṇṇanam iṇiyē

veruvaru kurutiyōṭu mayaṅki uruvu karantu
 oṟuvāyappaṭṭa teriyal ūṇcettup
 paruntu koṇṭu ukappa yām kaṇṭanam
 maṟappukal maintaṇ malainta mārē

The fall of a mighty warrior on the battle field while guarding the rampart is the situation that the poem aims at recapturing in words. Introducing the poem, Pope notes that the soldiers defending a city used to wear a garland of *nocci* flowers and leaves and that *nocci* (*Vitex Nirgundi*) with its fragrant blue flowers is called a five-leaved chaste tree. In his comment that follows the translation, he observes that *nocci* is a symbol of chastity and that the virgin fort guarded by the soldiers wearing this flower would laugh at its enemies as in that distant past love was largely linked with heroism.

Like linked gems are Nochchi's curling ringlets blue,
 Mid all the flowering trees is none whose tender hue
 So fills the soul with love as thine, whose blooming wreath
 Men see the youthful maiden's slender form ensheathe,
 In the wide guarded city-sight beloved of all;
 And when fierce enemies attack the moated wall,
 The warriors on their brows thy flowers defiant show,
 As sign they shield their virgin fort from every foe.

In Pope's version of the poem, the poet directly addresses the *nocci* tree though in the original the poet's description of the two scenes that she has witnessed is not addressed to anyone in particular. Quite evidently, Pope doesn't attempt a faithful translation but gives a paraphrase emphasizing the point that *Nocci* has become at once a symbol of both love and war. The entire first line of the Tamil piece is dropped while in the second part the beautiful scene of the *Nocci* garland being carried away by the vulture mistaking it for meat is unpardonably discarded. Because of his belief in the outworn Augustan idea that rhymes are extremely important to a poem, he sees to it that there are four pairs of rhymes in the eight lines of twelve syllables each, and for the sake of 'wreath' doesn't mind bringing in the archaic 'ensheathe'. He might have felt that his explanatory notes were enough to convey the meaning of the poem and that he was improving upon it by removing the picture of the vulture flying in the sky with the blood-smeared garland in its beak and by adding plenty of rhymes and alliterations!

A.K.Ramanujan's translation, in which the irony of the situation stands out in bold relief, makes the sense clear and appealing.

The chaste trees, dark-clustered,
Blend with the land
that knows no dryness;
the colours on the leaves
mob the eyes.

We've seen those leaves
on jeweled women,
on their mounds
of love.

Now the chaste wreath lies slashed
on the ground, so changed, so mixed
with blood, the vulture snatches it
with its beak,
thinking it raw meat.

We see this too
just because a young man
in love with war
wore it for glory.

In a footnote to the poem Ramanujan clarifies that the chaste tree refers to *nocci* which is ironically used as a double edged symbol as its leaves were given by young men to the ladies they were in love with and the garlands made of its leaves and flowers were worn by warriors. The Tamil poem depicts the two scenes in two long sentences but the translator describes, in five separate sentences, 1. the chaste trees 2. their leaves 3. jeweled women wearing those leaves 4. the vulture snatching the garland 5. the young warrior. By this he achieves clarity of meaning but sacrifices the economy of diction and the aesthetic delight provided by the long rhythmic utterances in the original.

Of course, he tries to compensate this loss by the introduction of sibilants such as 'chaste', 'slashed', 'so changed', 'so mixed', 'snatches' and other assonances like 'war', 'wore', 'for', 'glory'. And in the translation of *kaṇṇār kurūuttalāi* as "the colours on the leaves mob the eyes", Ramanujan the poet leaves his stamp.

Hart and Heifetz seem to strive hard to avoid the one major defect of Ramanujan's renderings when they attempt to retain the rhythmic grandeur of the original Tamil piece.

We used to see garments of *nocci* flowers, dark bunches grown on fields which never knew of a lack of water and their colours with filigreed ornaments would fill one's eyes! But now we see a kite taking flight after it has snatched up a torn garland of *nocci* flowers all changed and covered with a fearful smear of blood, because it had been worn by that man whose goal was courage.

As in the original, the two striking images are described in two long rhythmic sentences. But this laudable attempt lands them in trouble when they render *kaṇṇār* as "their colours worn across.... would fill one's eyes" which would mean that not the leaves but their colours were worn across the mounds of love! The phrases "*mellilāi makalir*" and "*aitakal alkul*" are translated as "jeweled women" and "mounds of love" by A.K. Ramanujan ignoring the epithets but as "women with filigreed ornaments" and "broad and lovely mounds of love" by Hart who aims at total fidelity. Ramanujan renders '*maṇappukal maintan*' as "a young man in love with war" but when he adds at the end "wore it for glory" the irrelevance of "for glory" may go unnoticed. Hart's rendering of *maṇappukal maintan* as "that man whose goal was courage" is rather inelegant.

The word '*alkul*' occurring frequently in *Caṅkam* poems is used to refer in general to the waist. Pope expressing his fear that such terms may be frowned upon by his squeamish contemporaries would avoid word for word translation and paraphrase the realistic description in a few words just as he translates "*mellilāi makalir aitaḥkal alkul*" as "maidens' slender form". Keeping the taste of his audience in mind, Ramanujan gives prominence to the passage whereas Hart doesn't hesitate to give a literal word for word rendering.

Poet Peruṇcittiranār's heart rending appeal to the philanthropist Kumanan expresses his abject poverty as well as his dignity and self esteem.

vaḷum nālōṭu vāṇṭu pala uṇmaiyyin
tīrtal cellātu eṇṇuyir eṇappala pulantu
kōlkāl ākakkurumpala votuṇki
nūl virittaṇṇa katuppiṇaḷ kaṇṭuyinru
muṇṇil pōkā mutirviṇaḷ yāyim
pacanta mēṇiyōṭu paṭar aṭa varunti
maruṇkil koṇṭa palkuru mākkal
picaintu tiṇa vāṭiya mulaiyaḷ peritu alintu
kuppaikkīrai koytakaṇ akaitta

murrā ilantalir koytu koṇṭu uppīru
 nīr ulaiyāka ēṇi mōriṇru
 avilpatam maṇantu pācaṭaku micaintu
 mācoṭu kuṛainta uṭukkaiyaḷ aṛam paḷiyāta
 tuvvāḷ ākiya en veyyōlum
 eṇṇāṅku iruvar neṇcamum uvappak kāṇavar
 karipuṇam mayakkiya akankaṅkollai
 airvaṇam vittī maiyuraḷ kavīṇi
 īnal cellā eṇaṅku ilumeṇak
 karuvivāṇam talaii yāṅku
 itta niṇpukaḷ ēttit tokka eṇ
 pacitiṇatttiraṅkiya okkalum uvappa
 uyarntu ēntu maruppiṇ kolkaliṇu perinum
 tavirntu viṭu paricil koḷḷalen uvantu nī
 iṇpura viṭutiyāyin ciṇitū
 kuṇṇiyum koḷval kūrvēṇkumaṇa
 atarpaṭa aruḷal vēṇṭuval viṇarpukaḷ
 vacaiyil viḷuttinaip piṇanta
 icaimēntōṇṇal niṇpāṭiya yāṇē

This poem with a long sentence running from the first line to almost the end of it is naturally a challenge to translators since its economy of diction is stretched to the utmost. As Pope, in his introduction to his own translation of *Tirukkural*, observes, the greatest difficulty to the foreign learner and to the translator arises from ellipsis, which in all its variety dominates Tamil poetry. But he concedes that though frustrating, it is one of the great beauties of Tamil. Hailing the piece by Peruṇcittiraṇār as one of the best pieces read by him on poverty, Pope translates it into English in his characteristic manner:

When will my life expend itself? The years
 unceasingly flow on! – Thus she complains,
 groping her feeble way with staff in hand,
 Her cheeks are thin, wrinkled like skeins of thread,
 She in the courtyard sleeps. Thus is it with my mother old?
 My tenderly beloved wife is wan and worn.
 Her starving infants cling around her empty breasts and wail;
 Our food is bitter herbs. We heard thy praise, -
 Our hearts leaped up were glad as thirsty soil when clouds
 big with rain overshadow them, and so we came
 singing thy praise – I and my kin with wasted forms
 yet though I were to gain a mighty elephant
 with shining tusks, I take not gift thrown me in scorn,
 Shouldst thou with pleasure give a courteous boon,

though small as *kundri* berry, grateful I receive.

O Kumanan, whose spear is keen. This is the boon that, praising thee, I wait.

In a footnote Pope again appreciates the poem saying that describing a common scene to be witnessed in some famine camps, it vividly brings to his mind's eye certain sights he had seen in his life. In the case of this poem also, Pope doesn't attempt a faithful translation but contents himself with paraphrasing a few difficult sections as briefly as possible. All the truthful descriptions of the land, the rain, the cooking of greens and the greatness of Kumanans' ancestors are avoided. He wrongly translates *nūl virittanna katuppinaḷ* "her cheeks are thin, wrinkled like skeins of thread" and *kaṇ tuyinru munril pōkā mutirviṇaḷ* "she in the courtyard sleeps". The full sense of *uvantu nīnpura viṭutiyāyiṇ* is not brought out by "shouldst thou with pleasure give". He makes the starving children weep whereas in the original "her breasts are withered as the many children squeeze and suck at them."

Even as an English poem, Pope's version is not commendable. It is free from rhyming couplets, one of Pope's favourite devices. The labour that he normally puts in has not gone into the making of this poem and what we get as a result is *slipshod*.

A.K.Ramanujan can't help reproducing it in an English version of forty seven lines, some long and many short.

My mother grumbles,
 "I've lived too many days and years
 still my life isn't coming to an end."
 she creeps about, taking little steps
 with a stick for a leg.
 Her head of hair a scatter of threads,
 eyes dim,
 she is too old even to walk to the yard.
 And my wife, her body gone sallow, is troubled
 by pain and sickness;
 breasts fallen,
 squeezed and devoured by the many children
 all about her;
 needy, she picks the greens
 in the garbage dump
 hardly sprouting

in the very spot she had plucked before,
 boils them in water
 without any salt,
 eats them without any buttermilk,
 She has forgotten the look of well-cooked food
 wearing unwashed tatters,
 my wife who loves me
 goes hungry,
 blames the order of things.
 You can make their hearts happy;
 I know you are known for giving
 like a raincloud-
 that pours with thunder and lightning
 on wide fields
 scorched and plowed by hunters
 where millet, sown with rice,
 is unable to ripen to rich dark grain,
 arrested by the heat;
 You can make my whole hungry family happy.
 Yet, I'll take nothing,
 not even a killer elephant with high tusks,
 if it is not given happily;
 But if you are pleased, and give
 to please,
 I'll even take a crab's-eye.
 So, Kumanan of the sharp spear,
 lord born in a clan without a stain,
 famed for its victories,
 show me your grace
 I ask you
 As I sing your praise.

Ramanujan has evidently made a Herculean effort to recapture the full sense of every word in the original and on more than one occasion, he has to use more words than the Tamil poet does in order to convey the subtle nuances. He renders *kōlkālākak kurumpala votuṅki* as "taking little steps with a stick for a leg", "*aviḷpatam maṇantu*" as "she has forgotten the look of well-cooked food", "*eṇveyyōḷ*" as "my wife who loves me", "*karuvi vāṇam talaiyi*" as "a raincloud that pours with thunder and lightning" and "*tavirntu viṭu paricil*" as "if it is not given happily". The fact that Ramanujan has to struggle hard to find suitable words and phrases in a language

celebrated for its copious vocabulary is spectacular testimony to the extraordinarily supple medium that Tamil was even more than two thousand years ago.

In this translation also, Ramanujan, with a view to achieving clarity, adopts his characteristic strategy of breaking a long sentence into numerous small utterances striking in their effect. The one defect of this method is that the rhythm of the English version doesn't reflect even remotely the rhythm of the original. Hart and Heifetz as usual seem to have taken this seriously and hence favour a different strategy.

My mother is old. Over and over she complains about how many years have passed and she is still alive and her life will not end. Hobbling with so many steps, a stick for an extra leg, her hair like spread string, her eyesight gone, she cannot even walk to the verandah. And my love wears her one meager, filthy garment and she is hungry and as she thinks of how things stand with her she grieves. Her body is faded, her breasts withered as the many children moving beside her squeeze them and suck at them. In despair she plucks a young, half-grown shoot sprouting on a *kīrai* plant on a garbage heap that others have picked near clean and she throws it into a pit without any salt and sets it on the fire. She does not even remember when she ever had rice and without any buttermilk she eats the green leaves and complains about the order of the world. Now you should make the hearts of these two people happy as I praise you for the fame of your generosity, which is like a cloud coming with lightning and roaring thunder as it sheds its rain down on millet not yet spouting its ears of a lovely dark colour, after it has been planted among wild rice on a wide space of land new to cultivation but burned over by men of the forest and transformed into a field. You should make my family happy, all of them, because they are shriveled up, consumed now by hunger. Yet should you even give me a ferocious elephant with its upraised tusks, I will not accept it if it is offered without goodwill. But if you should offer, with joy and to please us, even a tiny crab's eye seed, then I will willingly take it! Kumanan, you who wield a spear, sharp-pointed! Greatly glorious lord! Famed for your victories! Born into a flawless, towering lineage! I ask you to be gracious and satisfy us! I who sing about you!

Hart's translation tends to be, by and large, interpretive. Unmindful of the number of words he has to use, he is bent upon making the meaning of the original clear and unambiguous. But he has to pay very often a very heavy price in the form of poetic beauty. The aesthetic delight which Ramanujan's translation provides is, unfortunately, beyond the reach of Hart's.

The following renderings by the two contrasting sharply with each other are quite characteristic:

| SL Text | A.K.Ramanujan | Hart |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| pala pulantu | grumbles | over and over she complains about |
| kōlkālāka | a stick for a leg | a stick for an extra leg |
| paṭar aṭavarunti | troubled by pain and sickness | as she thinks of how things stand with her, she grieves |
| mācoṭu kuṟainta | wearing unwashed | one meager, filthy |
| uṭukkai | tatters | garment |
| Kuppaikkīrai... murrā | she picks the | She plucks a young |
| ilantaḷir koytu koṇṭu | greens... hardly | half grown shoot |
| koykaṇ akaitta | sprouting she had plucked before | sprouting on a kīrai plant |
| aṟam paḷiyā | She blames the order of things | She complains about the order of the world |

In almost all these cases, it will be evident, Hart's text is more detailed and closer to the original but less aesthetically satisfying than Ramanujan's. The long phrase "virar pukaḷ vacaiyil viḷuttiṇaippiranta icai mēntonral" is translated "lord born in a clan without a stain famed for its victories" by Ramanujan and "Greatly glorious lord! Famed for your victories! Born into a flawless towering lineage" by Hart. The former is natural while the latter smacks of artificiality. This may be one of the many instances of what Heifetz calls straining against the bounds of English syntax in order to convey the feel of the rolling rhythms of the original. But this kind of justification does not hold water because the translation thus achieved may give a misleading impression about the nature of the language employed in the original.

A poem by Pāṇṭiyan Arivuytai Nampi celebrates the ecstatic experience of having one's children around. A.K.Ramanujan has included an exemplary English rendering of this in his *Poems of Love and War* whereas G.U. Pope has ignored it. The former, in his characteristic manner, resorts to the techniques of foregrounding the indentation here also.

Even when a man has earned much
 Of whatever can be earned,
 shared it with many
 even when he is master of great estates,
 if he does not have children
 who patter on their little feet,
 stretch tiny hands,
 scatter, touch,
 grub with mouths
 and grab with fingers,
 smear rice and ghee
 all over their bodies,
 and overcome reason with love,
 all his days
 have come to nothing.

One of Ramanujan's strategies is to cut the poem into small parts in accordance with the ideas conveyed and the objects described and to indent one or two of them depending upon their relative importance. But the Caṅkam poems, on close scrutiny, reveal that their authors believed in a well formulated poetic theory which is close to what the greatest of western aestheticians have been recommending from time to time. As was earlier done by Coleridge, the New Critics of modern times led by I.A. Richards claim that a poem is an organic whole in which structure and texture are interdependent. Describing the experience of reading poetry, Coleridge observes that the journey itself should be as pleasing as the destination implying that a great poem should not, for its aesthetic impact, depend on twists and surprise-endings and that every part of the poem including its diction, imagery and form should contribute to the overall effect. Prudence demands that a translator doesn't disturb as far as possible the order of ideas in the original. If the readers of Ramanujan's renderings have no idea of the original, they may be misled to believe that some of the typical techniques of modern poetry employed by Ramanujan are of the Caṅkam pieces. Acutely aware of this problem, Heifetz avoids them and gives exclusive importance to a rhythm that is true to the original.

Piling up wealth and possessions, a man can feed crowds of people,
 but unless he had children coming to him in the middle of his meals,
 who cross the floor with their tiny steps, stretch out their small hands
 for the food, setting it down then, kneading it, chewing it stirring it

and smearing themselves all over with rice and ghee in a way that enraptures their father, then he will have won nothing throughout all the days of his life.

Taking the phrase ‘*īṭaiṭṭaṭa*’ together with ‘*kuṟukuṟu naṭantu*’ the old commentator of *Puraṇānūru* would interpret it as ‘slow movement in short steps’. Ignoring ‘*īṭaiṭṭaṭa*’, Ramanujan translates it “patter on their little feet”, an idiomatic English description of a child’s walk. Heifetz renders it “in the middle of his meals” implying that the child makes its appearance when the father is eating. In the Tamil poem, the phrases “*palarōṭu uṇṇum uṭaiṭṭaṭaṭa*” and “*mayakkuru makkaḷai illōrkku*” would, in the plural, mean both the parents and not refer to the father exclusively as the two translators have taken it. The old commentator’s interpretation includes father and mother as the pleasing experience is in reality shared by both.

Fortunately, a prose rendering of *Aṟivuṭai Nampi*’s poem has been given by F.W. Ellis, who cites it in the course of his translation of the *Tirukkuraḷ* chapter entitled “Having one’s children.”

Though in the highest degree prosperous, yet
when an entertainment of many dainties
hath been prepared for many guests, if
no children come tottering into the midst,
stretching out their little hands and
causing a pleasing confusion by seizing
on the food, eating with their mouth,
mixing it together, and scattering it
about, fruitless are, the lives of the givers
of the feast. (273)

In this translation, no discrimination is made against mothers. But the context here too is taken as the feast given by the rich. The original doesn’t refer to any particular occasion as it is a common daily experience in any household even in the absence of guests. If it opens with a description of the rich, it is because the poet wants to stress that life would have no meaning even to the otherwise fortunate people who are extremely wealthy if they have no children. This doesn’t mean that the poem speaks exclusively of the delight of the prosperous caused by children during a banquet.

Each of the translations by G.U. Pope, A.K. Ramanujan, and G.L. Hart has its own idiosyncratic features accounting for certain merits as

well as limitations. Pope translated a few pieces of *Puranānūru* as soon as it was rediscovered by the Tamil world. Ramanujan's *Poems of Love and War* was largely responsible for the international recognition presently accorded to Caṅkam poetry. It is a pity that the whole of *Puranānūru* was not translated by Pope or Ramanujan. The Tamils are beholden to Hart who, fully qualified for the task, came forward to do it in collaboration with a practicing poet of the caliber of Heifetz. We have a right to expect the best from them as the two embarked upon a new translation when the accrued scholarship on Caṅkam poetry was at its height. Their decision to avoid the outmoded English of Pope and the typically modern techniques of Ramanujan is indicative of their sagacious approach and discerning taste. And their attempt to recapture the rhythm of the original as far as possible is admirable. But, unfortunately, the final product of their cooperative endeavour of heroic proportions has proved to be a translation that is interpretive but, in many cases, devoid of the poetry of the original.

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21. TIRUKKURAL IN ENGLISH: FROM ELLIS TO SUNDARAM

None may question now the validity of the following statement by Albert Schweitzer on *Tirukkural*: “There hardly exists in the literature of the world a collection of maxims in which we find so much lofty wisdom” (200). That its excellence has been understood and acknowledged by several generations of scholars is evident from the many commentaries on it as well as from the numerous translations of it into English and other foreign languages. The first English rendering by Kindersley, though of select couplets only, came out as early as 1794 and since then, there has been a steady stream of translations, good, bad and indifferent. Of these, the ones by Ellis, Pope, VVS Aiyar and P.S. Sundaram have been chosen here for close scrutiny not because they are the best in all respects but because, being representative of diverse types of translation, they reveal certain characteristic merits and limitations. Ellis brings to bear upon his incomplete translation done in 1812 a scholarship impressively wide-ranging and knowledge of Tamil literature incredibly extensive. G.U. Pope has made the most heroic attempt of transforming the *kural*s into English heroic couplets. A resurgence of nationalism during the struggle for independence forced a native scholar like VVS Aiyar to undertake its translation with a view to highlighting an Indian classic. Prof. P.S. Sundaram’s claim is that his work fulfills the long-felt need for a modern version, as many of its predecessors are in an archaic language.

What Ellis aims at is more an interpretation and a commentary than a literal word-to-word translation, giving as it does a free metrical version of each couplet, followed by a critical, extremely learned analysis of the text and an illustration of the notes and scholarly disquisitions on the mythology, philosophical and religious systems and the beliefs, customs and cultural traits of the Indian society. His rendering of the very first couplet is indicative of his keener interest in bringing out the greatness of the original than in being naively faithful or needlessly pompous. The first *kural*,

*akara mutala eluttellām: āti
pakavaṇ mutarrē ulaku*

is an acid test for translators and commentators because it means much more than what it states, makes a most contentious statement as though it were a universally accepted fact and validates it on the basis of an apparently simple simile, which closely probed proves extremely profound. Though analogy is not proof and God is known to be incomparable, poets, theologians and philosophers very often resort to the strategy of proof by analogy where the Supreme Being is concerned. Here Valluvar's use of a simile that is strikingly original and astoundingly appropriate has floored many a translator.

A, as its first of letters, every speech maintains;
The primal Deity is first through all the world's domains. (Pope:3)

A is the starting point of the world of sound;
Even so in the Great Original
The starting-point of all that exists. (Iyer:3)

As Alpha is of all the letters first and source of birth
So God Primeval is alone the source of all this earth.
(Balasubramanian:3)

Alphabets all have 'A' as their origin: the world has
the primordial God as its origin. (Vanmikanathan:1)

A begins the alphabet
And God, Primordial, the world. (Sundaram:19)

Such translations are easily misleading since any reader not acquainted with Tamil would conclude that the English alphabet A or the Greek alphabet alpha is the first of Tamil letters. Also the fact that the vowel 'a' is the first in every alphabet may not be driven home by these renderings. It is Ellis who manages it beautifully though at the cost of brevity and even fidelity. His translation reads

As ranked in every alphabet the first
The self same vowel stands, so in all worlds,
The Eternal God. (Ellis:1)

And he adds the following explanation:

The first of our vowels, when pronounced short, is here intended,

which is actually the first letter in all alphabets, and the meaning of the distich, therefore, is that, as this letter, however varying in form, is the first in all alphabets, so the same Deity, however varying in his energies and attributes, governs all nature.

Though he has great admiration for his predecessor, Beschi, whose prose and poetic writings are often cited, he doesn't hesitate to draw our attention to the pitfalls which the Catholic priest could not avoid in his famous Latin translation. While translating

Tanakkuvamai yillātān tāḷ cērntārkkallāl
Maṇakkavalai mārral aritu.

The anxious mind, against corroding thought,
No refuge hath, save at the sacred feet
Of him to whom no likeness is. (Ellis:9)

Ellis finds fault with Beschi's Latin commentary which fails to take note that God has neither an equal nor an object for comparison.

The Latin commentary renders the original
"qui sibi similem non habet" but as
'uvamai' is an abstract noun it ought to be
"Qui sibi similitudinem non habet." The author
says not merely that there is no similitude by which
he can be described, but also no figure of human
speech by which his nature can be expressed. (Ellis:10)

Commenting on the title *aravāli antaṇaṇ*, Ellis observes that Beschi assigns it to the Supreme Being in his *Chaturagarati* while all the other Tamil dictionaries give it to Arugan, the Jain god (Ellis:11).

While the Tamil translators like Vanmikanathan and P.S.Sundaram have to depend upon V.M.Goplakrishnamachariar for their understanding of Parimelazhakar's commentary in Tamil and make an open confession to this effect, the British-born Ellis of the Madras Civil Service has gone to great pains to master the foreign language in such a way that he can comprehend the original commentary and reflect upon it authoritatively. Where required, he can give a superb English rendering of the commentator's complex prose also.

Ellis's exquisite prose version of Parimelazhakar's interpretation of the first kural of "Nīttār perumai" is as follows:

A strict adherence to the proper rule is true devotion. By thus adhering to the rules appropriate to their respective tribes or states virtue increaseth; by the increase of virtue, sin is abated; by the abatement of sin, ignorance is destroyed; by the destruction of ignorance, the difference between time and eternity is known, and reflection on the evils of mortal birth and disgust at the pleasures enjoyed, in transient succession, in this world and in the heaven of inferior deities arises; by reflecting on these the desire of eternal beatitude is produced; from this proceeds the abandonment of the fruitless works, which are the cause of mortal birth, and the practice of meditation, and from meditation true knowledge; the destruction of that which is external as mine and of that which is internal as I then ceases and these two affections are thus renounced with abhorrence. It is thus to be explained (Ellis: 57-58).

Never intimidated by Parimelazhakar's language or his display of scholarship or his awesome reputation as a commentator, Ellis can correct him when he goes wrong.

There are numerous passages in the course of his long, leisurely but well-researched commentary where Ellis makes it evident that his understanding of Valluvar's vision and philosophy of life is as good as, if not better than, that of any Tamil scholar or translator. The salient features of not only "Valluvam" but of other Indian systems of philosophy have also been minutely probed and justly assessed by him. While distinguishing between Visistadwaita and Adwaita, Ellis shrewdly remarks that "the metaphysics of these sects are as opposite as those of Priestley and Berkely; but, however different in their philosophical opinions, their religious belief and practice, which they both derive from the Veda, is nearly the same" (Ellis 30). Examining Parimelazhakar's exposition of the philosophy of the Sankya School, which makes nature the cause of nature, Ellis explains the differences between Kapila and Patanjali and concludes that "the whole reasoning of both the schools rests on the assumption that matter is essentially homogeneous and that there is a substance into which all other substances are resolvable" (Ellis: 88). Quoting the best stanzas from *Civavākkīyam* that embody the essence of Civavakkiyar's world view, Ellis writes that Civavakkiyar is one that "eschews alike the figurative mythology of the puranas and the mystical philosophy of the Upanishads and Agamas; denies the efficacy of all religious ceremonies, whether prescribed by the smritis or invented in more recent times; derides the notion that the Almighty could have made an inherent difference in his creatures and finally with the doctrine of

metempsychosis, rejects most of the dogmas believed by the various sects of Hindus” (Ellis: 34).

The subtleties of Tamil concepts and the nuances of meanings of Tamil words are always within the grasp of the capacious mind of Ellis. Translating ‘Aram’ as virtue, he says that the Tamil word “possesses great latitude of meaning: it signifies virtue generally, moral right as opposed to wrong, religious righteousness and the merit resulting from religious acts, the positive rights of things and persons, as ordained by law or established by custom, and the maintenance of such rights, or justice, and lastly charity in the abstract and charitable acts of every description.” (Ellis 97). The word ‘Ākulam’ in the Kuraḷ ‘manattukaṇ mācilaṇ ātal āṇaittaṇ ākula nīra pīra’ is translated by him as “evanescent sound”. Defending his rendering, he adds that though the word signifies literally ‘a loud turbulent noise’, it may be metaphorically rendered “ostentation, hypocrisy” and that though Parimelazhakar paraphrases it by ‘āravāram’ which signifies literally the confused clamour arising from a mob, it is often synonymous with ‘iṭampam’ the term commonly used to express pomposity, ostentation, hypocrisy (Ellis: 115). His comment on the term ‘ilvāḷkkai’ is, again, insightful in his introduction to the chapter on domestic life.

‘il’ literally, a house, signifies here the domestic state and ‘vāḷtal’ to live, not merely to exist, but to enjoy life, to prosper, to flourish; the direct meaning of ‘ilvāḷkkai’ therefore is the enjoyment of domestic life, but it is generally used in this chapter for the duties of domestic life; true enjoyment in any state consisting in the correct discharge of the duties of it (Ellis: 149).

The chapter on ‘iṇiyavai kūḷal’ is called by Ellis “on courtesy” but he adds that the term may be more strictly rendered “on affability”. In this context, he chooses to explain that the genius of Tamil is “to hint rather than to define the signification of its words, and it selects generally a single idea to indicate a class or series and the author accordingly comprehends under a phrase, expressive of their principal characteristics ‘iṇcol’ or ‘iṇiya kūḷal’ pleasing speech, the several modifications of the primary notion conveyed by affability, courtesy or similar terms” (Ellis: 335). In one of his most learned asides here, Ellis wonders why so opulent a language as Greek has no term for ‘iṇiyavai kūḷal’, forcing Aristotle “to describe the nameless virtue as the intermediate habit between flattery and moroseness, between that disposition which inclines the feeble minded in all cases to sacrifice their own opinions in deference to others, and that by

which men are excited to contend for the mere sake of contention” (Ellis: 335).

Ellis castigates certain European writers who, careless in their censures and slightly acquainted with the Indian tongues, have chosen to say that these have no word corresponding to ‘gratitude’ the inference being that the very idea of gratitude is unknown to the Indian. He tells them,

To this calumny let this chapter of Thiruvalluvar (the one on *ceynnanriyarital*) and the accompaniments to it be the answer, as in it the idea will be found to be expressed on many varying modes (Ellis:353-4).

Translating *naṭuvunilaimai* as ‘equity’ and ‘distributive justice’ he contends that the Tamil compound intimately corresponds to the Greek term for justice for *naṭuvu* means primarily the middle and justice by a metaphor only and *naṭuvunilaimi*, consequently, maintenance of a middle station or state of equality with regard to all others, not moving to either side or being biased.... by any consideration of fear, anger or affection (Ellis: 367).

Though Ellis has set out to do full justice to the original, he is highly self-critical and at times, like a true creative artist, after giving a free as well as a literal rendering of the original besides copious explanatory notes, he may end on a note of despair as when he does in his struggle with the *kūral ennanri konrārkkum uyvuṇṭām uyvillai ceynanri konra makarku*. “Both the translation and explanation very inadequately convey the strength and vivid expression of the original” (Ellis: 356).

One wishes that Ellis had translated the whole of *Tirukkural* into English.

It is quite evident that G.U.Pope, an assiduous student of Tamil literature, has done his home work before embarking upon a translation of what he considered “one of the highest and purest expressions of human thought”(Pope:i). The long introduction witnesses to the preparation he has made to equip himself to the formidable task ahead even though he says that while doing the work he felt the lack of the advice and assistance of native scholars and regrets that no native eye has seen his manuscript. Briefly discussing some of the controversial issues relating to *Tirukkural*, he pronounces his verdicts authoritatively. The idea that *Tirukkural* may be an anthology of stanzas by diverse hands is rejected outright by Pope,

who argues that it is the perfect and most elaborate work of one master and that the third part called “*kāmattuppāl*”, though seemingly separable, also bears the stamp of our bard. As one link in a chain of evidence, Pope points out that though the poet uses *toṭi* in the sense of lady nine times, there is a studied variety in epithets, none of which are used twice. Pope is absolutely certain that the Christian Scriptures were among the sources of inspiration and that much of Vaḷḷuvar’s teaching is an echo of the Sermon on the Mount. But while mentioning the twelve native commentaries on *Kural*, he advises the readers to disregard “the meanings read into the verses by persons, native or European, who are anxious to prove that the Tamil sage taught their own dogmas” (V).

Why did Vaḷḷuvar refrain from any exposition of *Vīṭu* or *Moksha*? Pope’s hunch is that the poet might not have been satisfied with the glimpses he had obtained of man’s future and waited for light or might have felt that his people were not prepared for higher teaching. Here the British scholar doesn’t seem to realize that he is being extremely unfair to Vaḷḷuvar as well as to the Tamils, whom he has earlier called ‘one great race’.

It is when speaking about the problems of translating *Kural* and about the Tamil meters that Pope steals a march on all other translators. He claims that his translation is faithful inasmuch as nowhere does it include an idea or thought which the poet doesn’t intend to convey. It is a metrical translation where he tries to reproduce even the rhythm in many cases though he confesses to his inability to retain the inimitable grace, condensation and point of the original. Having been mainly acquainted with Tamil didactic poetry, he gives a sincere expression of his experiences of it.

The best compositions are quatrains or couplets each containing a complete idea, a moral epigram. Their construction resembles that of a design in mosaic. The materials fitted together are sometimes also very precious stones and pure gold. And the design? Why you walk round it, and try to catch it in all lights, and feel at first, and often for a long time, as if it meant nothing at all, till you catch some hint, and at once it lies revealed, something to be thought of again and again, some bit of symbolism it may be, not infrequently grotesque, often quaint, but sometimes also of rare beauty. (XV)

This estimate, when not taken together with some of Pope’s other statements on Tamil classics, may be slightly disappointing and may even

indicate that Ellis, his predecessor, had a keener sensibility and could cover a wider range of Tamil literature than Pope. However, the scholar-priest acknowledges the fact that Tamil is not a dialect of Sanskrit but an independent language with a copious and original vocabulary. That the Tamil metres are entirely different from the Sanskrit ones is also recognized by him.

A very competent account of the metre of *Kural* leads him to the conclusion that the variety of rhythms in it is astonishingly great. The prevalent tone in Tamil *Veṇpas* is called *ceppalōcai* meaning recitative tone, which is of three kinds: balanced recitative (*tūṅkicaic ceppal* when only the *iyarcīr* feet are used), grave recitative (*ēnticaicceppal* when only the *veṇcīr* feet are used excepting in the seventh foot) and mixed recitative (*oḷukicaicceppal* where *iyarcīr* and *veṇcīr* are combined). Pope is able to identify the tone in every one of the couplets. For the three types of recitative, the following couplets are given as examples.

malarmicai ēkinān māṇaṭi cērntār
nilamicai nīṭuvāl vār (tūṅkicai)

yātānum nāṭāmāl urāmāl enṇoruvan
cāntuṇaiyum kallāta vāru (ēnticai)

tuppārkkut tuppāya tuppākki tuppārkkut
tuppāya tūum maḷai (oḷukicai)

In Pope's calculation, only one *Kural* uses grave recitative, one hundred and ten use balanced recitative and the rest mixed recitative. The number of *veṇcīr* feet decides the gravity of the tone. There is only one *veṇcīr* in

akara mutala eḷuttellām āti
pakavan mutarre ulaku

whereas there is only one *iyarcīr* in

ennanṇi konrārkum uyvuṇṭām uyvillai
ceynanṇi konra makarṇku

Unfortunately, our native translators have not cared to master the prosodic complexities accounting for the beauty and splendour of Tamil poetry, even though they had Pope as their model and were expected to make further explorations in the field and provide greater insights than the foreigner.

It was Pope's choice of the heroic couplet as the most suitable form

for his English rendering that landed him in deep waters. He seems to have been fascinated by the favourite metre of the Augustans who have employed it with remarkable success in their satiric verse. Pope failed to realize that this metre would add to the difficulty of translating a Tamil couplet, known to be a marvel of condensation. When recapturing the sense and the beauty of the original in two lines of ten syllables each in English requires a Herculean effort, the translator will be hard pressed to find a pair of proper rhymes without sacrificing the sense. Ever in search of such rhymes, Pope commits the blunder of adding words and ideas of his own. The couplet,

*nakutal poruṭṭanru naṭṭal mikutikkaṇ
mēr cenṛiṭṭal poruṭṭu (781)*

is translated

Not for laughter only friendship all the pleasant day
But for strokes of sharp reproving, when from right you stray.

When in the original there is nothing corresponding to the phrase ‘all the pleasant day’, it is added solely for the sake of a rhyme for ‘stray’. In the stanzas of “Kāmattuppāl”, such additions ruin the suggestive richness of the *Kural*. For instance,

*kālaikkuc ceyta nanṛenkol evaṅkol yān
mālaikkuc ceyta pakai.*

is rendered by Pope

O morn, how have I won thy grace? Thou bring’st relief! O eve, why art thou foe? Thou dost renew my grief!

Here the love-tormented lady cries, “What good did I do to the morning and what harm to the evening?” From this the reader will infer what the morning and evening have been doing to her! But Pope gives the details doing what Parimelazhakar is expected to do.

At times, Pope invites trouble by giving his version in four lines of two rhymes. The *Kural*

*tummuc ceruppa alutāl numar ullal
emmai maraiṭṭirō enru*

becomes

And so next time I checked sneeze,

She forthwith wept and cried
(That woman difficult to please)
Your thoughts from me you hide.

The third line is needlessly added. And the fourth line happens to be a misinterpretation as it doesn't convey the idea "you hide from me the fact that your people have thought of you". The great couplet,

arītōrum ariyāmai kaṇṭarrāl kāmam
ceritōrum cēyilai māṭṭu (110)

poses an extraordinary challenge to translators. Pope's translation

The more men learn the more their lack of learning they detect;
"T is so" when I approach the maid with glowing jewels decked.

retains neither its beauty nor its full sense. Those who are not familiar with the original may not understand what Pope means by his evasive "T is so"! V.V.S.Aiyer, who ought to have known better, ruins the sense of the second line, when he renders the *kural*

Even as a man feeleth his ignorance the more keenly the more wise
he growth even so do I love her the more ardently the more I enjoy
her company.

Parimelazhakar brings out the full meaning of the *Kural* in charming prose.

One of the major ideas constantly driven home by Socrates is that as we know more and more we realize that we know less and less. This profound thought is used as a simple simile by Valluvar to describe the experience of a lover who says, "Just as the more we know the more ignorant we feel, the more intense the pleasure that I derive from the union with this lady the more inexhaustible it proves to be.

Pope is occasionally baffled by Valluvar's use of hyperbole. The Tamil bard, for the sake of emphasis or for poetic beauty, may resort to this figure of speech. The couplet,

vīlum iruvarkkinitē valiyiṭai
pōlapaṭā muyakku (1108)

means that the lovers fond of each other are delighted by the embrace that cannot be severed even by the wind. Perhaps mistaking this for a wild conceit, Pope makes the literal wind metaphoric and spoils the

beauty of the poem when he translates it,

Sweet is the embrace of these whom fond affection binds,
Where no dissevering breath of discord entrance finds.

In all his innocence, Pope does not understand that there is no room for discord in the situation described by Valluvar!

On a few occasions, in his over-enthusiasm to achieve Valluvar's characteristic economy of diction, Pope makes howlers. One of the best known Kuraḷs,

nerunal uḷanoruvan inrillai yennum
perumai uṭaittiv vulaku (336)

is translated

Existing yesterday, today to nothing hurled!
Such greatness owns this transitory world.

which may mean to some at least that this ephemeral world has the glory of existing yesterday and being destroyed today!

Urged by good intentions, Pope undertook a stupendous task and deserves our unqualified praise and gratitude. In his *magnum opus*, there are instances in which he acquits himself admirably. Here are a few shining examples of his craftsmanship.

nñkil terūm kurukunḱāl taṇṇennum
tī yāṇṭupperrāḷival. (1104)

Withdraw it burns, approach, it soothes the pain,
Whence did the maid this wondrous fire obtain?

neñcattar katalavarāka veytuṇṭāl
añjutum vēpākkarintu (1128)

Within my heart my lover dwells, from food I turn
That smacks of heat, lest he should feel it burn.

errenru iraṅkuva ceyyarka ceyvanēl
marranna ceyyāmai nanru (655)

Do nought that soul repenting must deplore
If thou hast sinned it is well thou dost sin no more.

In his preface, V.V.S. Aiyar, contends that "Drew had given but a feeble translation, while Dr.Pope's verses do not at all do justice to the

merits of the original but on the contrary deform its grand thoughts by giving them a stilted expression" (Iyer IV) and that in the translation of the titles of chapters also Pope has been "singularly unhappy in many instances" (Iyer VIII). As very unfortunate renderings of the original that do not give the reader any idea of what is contained in the respective chapters, Iyer mentions the following:

The knowledge of power (48) for valiyaṛital
 Knowing the place (50) for iṭanaṛital
 The Right Sceptre (55) for ceṅkōṇmai
 Power in Speech (65) for colvaṇmai
 Power in Action (67) for viṇaittiṭpam
 The knowledge of Indications (71) for kuṛipparital
 Knowing the quality of Hate (88) for pakaittiṭam terital

It becomes clear that Iyer has defined himself against Pope when he declares that the latter has wrongly chosen the heroic couplet instead of the style of the English Bible, which, in his view, lends itself to the expression of every variety of thought "from the plain and the naïve to the most sublime and dignified that the human mind can conceive" (iv). When V.V.S. Aiyar advocates the Authorized Version of the Bible as the model to be followed by the translator of the *Bible*, he asserts that the thought and diction of Vaḷḷuvar resembles the great masterpieces of the Bible, especially the Ecclesiastics, the Proverbs and Wisdom of Solomon and the sermons of Jesus. But later in the same preface, he attacks Pope for having spoken of Christian influences on *Tirukkural* and declares that "the *Kural* does not show that he has ever heard of any of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity" (xxvv). If Beschi, Digot and Pope are insinuating that Vaḷḷuvar's work could not have been moral in tone but for the impact of the teachings of the Apostle St. Thomas at Mylapore, V.V.S. Aiyar, P.S. Sundaram and others of the same ilk make much of what they believe to be echoes of Manu's *Dharmasastra*, Kamantaka's *Nītisāra*, Kautilya's *Arthasastra* and even Vatsyayana's *Kāmasūtra*, all of which were written in Sanskrit. But even a casual comparison of the so-called parallel passages will reveal the truth of what G.U. Pope says:

It would be possible, indeed, to find a close Sanskrit parallel to nearly every gnomic verse in Tamil poetry, but in many cases the beauty, spontaneity, and terseness of the Tamil stanza seem to prove its originality (1893: xxxix).

Discussing the possible sources of *Nālaṭiyar*, Pope observes that "a majority of the verses were almost certainly sung by Jain ascetics, yet

there are a few that seem to be from the *Mahabharata* and undoubtedly many of the quatrains are fragments of the old ethical teaching which goes under the name of Nīti Sastra” and significantly adds in a footnote the following quote from M.Monier William’s *Indian Wisdom*, 55: “How inferior the verses of Bhartrihari are may be seen by examining the version given in Trubner’s Series” (1893: xi). One should remember here that Bhartrihari is supposed to be the greatest master of didactic verse in Sanskrit.

V.V.S.Aiyar swears by the suitability of the biblical language but his English is a far cry from that of the Authorized Version. By a profuse sprinkling of words like ‘behold’, ‘thou’, ‘thy’, ‘thine’, and suffixing verbs with ‘th’ and ‘eth’ he hopes to reproduce the biblical forms forgetting that simplicity is the hallmark of the language of the Bible as well as of *Tirukkural*. The diction in *Kural* is simple, much simpler than that of Caṅkam poems though the syntax may at times be complex. It is for this reason that Pope says, “Valluvar is generally very simple and his commentators very profound” (Pope:v). But V.V.S. Aiyar’s language is often needlessly pompous and circumlocutory. If some of Pope’s chapter-headings, are, as alleged by Iyer, misleading, the Tamil translator’s are highflown and long-winded. He calls, for instance,

Pocčāvāmai (which means forgetfulness or slackness), Guarding against Insouciance (Ch 54)

veruvanta ceyyāmai, Abstaining from deeds that cause trepidation (Ch 57)

iṭukkaṇaliyāmai, Intrepidity in the face of misfortune (Ch 63)

maṇṇaraiccērntolukal, Comporting oneself before princes (Ch 70)

peṇvaliccēral, Submission of wife Government (Ch 91)

nāṇutturavuraittal, Overpassing the bounds of decorum (Ch 114)

paṭarmelintiraṅkal, Bewailing the pangs of separation and pining away (Ch 117)

Kaṇvituppalital, The wasting of the eyes through wistful longing (Ch 118)

Taṇippaṭarmikuti, Anguish of heart that the husband feeleth not as oneself (Ch 120)

Puṇarcci vitumpal, The impatience of the pair to fly to each other’s arms (Ch 129)

Pulavi nuṇukkam, The finesses of bouderie (Ch 132)

ūṭaluvakai The Charm of bouderie (Ch 133)

While translating individual couplets also, extremely enamoured of ostentation, he sacrifices brevity and uses many more words than the original to convey much less.

The couplet

camaṇ ceytu cīrtūkkum kōlpōl amaintorupāl
kōṭamai Cāṇrōrkkaṇi (118)

becomes in his prose version:

Behold the weighing beam, for it is straight in itself and weigheth justly: the glory of the wise is to be like unto it and to incline neither to this side nor to that (Iyer 28).

One of the well-known *Kuraḷs*,

puṇṇkunṇi kaṇṭanaiyarēṇum akaṇkunṇi
mūkkil kariyāruṭaittu (277)

is rendered

The Kunri seed is fair on one side, but the other side of it is black; there are men who are like unto it; they are fair on the outside, but their inside is all black.

All the rhetorical skill of Iyer doesn't help him retain the poetry in the original. The *Kuraḷ*,

oḷiyārmuṇ oḷiyarātal veḷiyārmuṇ
vāncutaivaṇṇam koḷal (714)

is deprived of its poetic metaphor in the rendering,

Discuss wisdom in the congregation of the wise,
but answer fools according to the measures of their folly.

It is a pity that the subtle suggestions of many a word in the sparsely worded *Kuraḷ* are lost on the translator. In one of the most remarkable couplets, the lover states that the lady's embrace gives him the joy that a householder experiences when he, staying in his house, eats his share of the food.

tamilliruntu tamatu pāttuṇṭarrāl
ammā arivai muyakku (1107)

Here the simile conveys Valluvar's vision of life as it is a celebration of life on earth and the first line mentions the requirements for a joyous

life but all the three of them, Pope, Iyer and Sundaram, miss the emphasis on one's own house (தம் இல்) when they translate the Kural:

As when one eats from household store, with kindly grace
Sharing his meal: such is this golden maid's embrace (Pope: 153).

The embrace of this lovely lady is supremely joyous, even as the family life of the householder who eateth his portion only after distributing charity (Iyer 230).

Clasping this girl my joy is already
A householder's who works, shares and eats (133).

As usual, Pope hunting for a rhyme for 'embrace' adds the superfluous phrase 'with kindly grace'. Iyer's weakness being pleonasm, he seems to insist on repeating the idea that one can infer from what has already been said when he ends his sentence with "only after distributing charity"; in his eagerness to be verbally economical, Sundaram has ignored the significance of 'tammilliruntu'.

Prof P.S. Sundaram's version, enjoying the prestige of publication by Penguin Books that guarantees international circulation, has had the advantage of numerous earlier translations by foreigners and native scholars but hasn't, alas, derived much benefit from them. Categorically stating that "no English translation of the Kural is entirely satisfactory," Sundaram chooses to comment on only two translations while dismissing all the rest as "mostly pedestrian, if not sheer doggerel!". In his opinion, Pope's lines, in an antique metre, "extend right across the page like pythons while Rajaji's prose rendering is less concerned with Valluvar the poet than with Valluvar the thinker and teacher" (15-16). The other great advantage of being a Tamilian exposed to English education at no less a university than Oxford hasn't helped him much. His introduction and end-notes have nothing comparable to Pope's introduction, let alone the latter's 'Lexicon and Concordance'. That he hasn't understood the splendour of the architectonics of *Tirukkural* becomes evident when he states that the rigid adherence to the number ten has often resulted in the same idea appearing in different words in order to make up the prescribed number of stanzas, for instance, couplets 8 and 10 under chapter 1 of the poem (10).

His renderings of the two couplets

aravāli antaṇaṇ tāl cērntārkkallāl
piṇavāli nīntal aritū (8)

The feet of the Lord with the Virtue-wheel
Will help to cross the sea of birth (19)

piṛavipperuṅkaṭal nīntuvar nīntar
īraivaṇaṭi cērātār(10)

The ocean of births can be crossed by those
Who clasp God's feet as none else (19)

bereft of all poetry and profundity of the original make them appear the same! Sundaram seems to have ignored Parimēlaḷakar's insightful remarks on the nature, function and relevance of each couplet in every chapter.

In one place in the introduction, Sundaram maintains that since all surviving manuscripts contain 1330 verses and attribute them to one single author, viz., Valluvar, "he has as much right to his identity as the author of the *Kuraḷ* as Homer to his as the author of *the Iliad* and *the Odyssey*" (10). First of all, the example he gives is erroneous because modern western scholarship has discussed at length the question of the collective authorship of what are known as Homer's writings! To add insult to injury, three pages later in the same introduction, Sundaram, contradicting himself, declares,

Whether all these chapters (of "Poruṭpāl") were conceived and carried out by one man who, by his literary skill, gave it a place in the Tamil Language as significant as the *Arthasastra* in Sanskrit, may well be doubted. For all we know, some of these chapters at least may have been later accretions and not all of them by the same man (13).

That Prof.Sundaram's knowledge of Tamil prosody and Tamil literary tradition is not very sound may be understood when he supports the view of E.J.P.Kupier of the Kern institute, Leiden that in as many as 119 of the 380 stanzas of Book 1 of the *Kuraḷ*, the correct way of printing the stanzas should be three feet in the first line and four in the second (15). This view, also cherished by Pope, is born of the ignorance of the nature and function of a *Kuraḷ* Venpa as conceived by the ancient Tamils, who also knew about the complex role of rhymes and alliterations in different poetic forms. And Valluvar was a past master in the art of using initial and internal rhymes in the right place.

Though Sundaram doesn't speak of V.V.S. Aiyar's translation, he seems

to have defined himself against Iyer as well as against Pope when he harps on the virtue of brevity:

Those who translate the *Kural* at length do not do it the least justice, for its soul is brevity and with it least is most just. The poetry, to adapt Wilfred Owen, is in the pithy" (16).

But his ideal of brevity at any cost leads to insipid renderings wholly devoid of poetry. When he translates

Villēruḷavar pakai koḷinum koḷḷarka
Collēruḷavar pakai. (872).

Make foes of bowmen, if you must,
Never of penmen.

the beautiful metaphor that equates the learned and the physically mighty with ploughmen is lost and 'penmen' may create the impression that *Tirukkural* is a modern work. When one reads Sundaram's couplet,

My love's white teeth and soft lips
Are milk and honey (135).

one would think that in the original the lady's teeth and lips are simply compared to milk and honey respectively. But it is supposed to be a translation of

pāloṭutēn kalantarrē paṇimoli
Vāleyirūriya nīr (1121).

His prime interest is in paraphrasing the idea of a couplet in a minimum number of words as he ignores the fact that Valluvar gives equal importance to the idea and its poetic expression.

As VVS Aiyar rightly says,

Sparkling wit and humour, the pointed statement, fancy, irony, the naïve question, the picturesque simile, there is not one of these and others of the thousand tricks of the born artist that our author has not employed in this perfect master-piece of art. (xxxvii)

But all these tricks, unknown to the *Dharmasastras*, *Nitisastras* and *Kamasutras* which Sundaram considers the sources of *Tirukkural*, are given the go-by in his English renderings.

Vaḷḷuvar was far ahead of his times in his insightful perceptions of certain aspects of life and literature. When he says,

*naviltorūṁ nūlnayam pōlum payiltorūṁ
paṇpuṭāiyāḷar toṭarpu* (783).

he means, “Just as the more you study a work the greater the beauty it reveals, the closer the friendship with the cultured, the greater the pleasure you will derive” but in Sundaram’s translation, what remains is the comparison, not the revelation behind it:

Good friends are like good books
A perpetual delight (99).

Sundaram’s trenchant economy may often destroy the poetry of the original, may at times distort its idea and may occasionally disclose nothing of it. When he writes,

That friendship is mean which boasts,

“He loves me and I him” (99).

the reader may wonder why Valluvar should be so harsh on such friends that simply declare their love for each other. But the original couplet states the reason unambiguously:

*Ṇaiyar ivar emakku ṇṇam yāmeṇru
Puṇaiyinum pullennum naṭpu* (790).

It is heartening to note that such translations notwithstanding, some great men of the west could identify the uniqueness of Vaḷḷuvar’s work as evidenced in the following statement by Ariel, who calls *Tirukkural*, ‘Ce livre sans nom’ par un autre sans nom (This book, without name, by an author, without name):

He is equally perfect in thought, in language and in poetry, in the austere metaphysical contemplation of the great mysteries of the divine nature, as in the easy and graceful analysis of the tenderest emotions of the heart.

(Pope: ii)

If a translator of *Tirukkural* loses sight of one of the three dimensions – thought, language and poetry – or overemphasizes one of them, he will have to pay a heavy price for his irresponsibility.

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The essays in this volume examine ancient Tamil poetry and poetics from diverse contemporary perspectives and attempt to substantiate the view that the claim of classics like *Tolkāppiyam*, *Eṭṭuttokai*, *Pattuppāṭṭu*, *Tirukkural*, and *Cilappatikāram* to international recognition and to eternal fame is based on solid grounds. Extending the field of investigation with frameworks that are global and subjecting the ancient Tamil texts to a close scrutiny, these articles seek to convince the non-Tamil readers that Tamil deserves the classical status that has equated it with Greek and Latin which have been cherished by the West as classical languages for a long time.

